

# CURRENT

FAITH MEETS LIFE AND CULTURE

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 Seventh-day Adventist  
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Andrews University

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## THE VALUE OF ADVENTIST SCHOLARSHIP: STRIVING FOR EXCELLENCE AND ADVANCING IN TRUTH

Jesus Christ uttered a very powerful statement about a true scholar who may be compared to a scribe or an expert in the law of God: “Therefore every scribe who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old.” (Matthew 13:52 ESV) The NIV translation characterizes this specialist in the law as a disciple of God’s kingdom who constantly searches for truth and from the storeroom of wisdom shares its treasure: “Therefore every teacher of the law who has become a disciple in the kingdom of heaven is like the owner of a house who brings out of his storeroom new treasures as well as old.”

God’s revelation is like a precious treasure that needs to be owned, valued, and then properly distributed in order to bring forth from it old and new truth, and not to only repeat things that are already known. A fresh and deep understanding of God’s truth needs to be reaffirmed as well as discovered, because truth has to be constantly actualized and formulated anew for the contemporary and younger generation. In this way, we may be established and believe in and proclaim the “present truth” (2 Peter 1:12 NKJV). The totality of God’s wisdom, with all its richness and variety, needs to be explored in order for us to know God’s mind and cultivate His way of thinking (Deuteronomy 29:29; Matthew 16:23; 2 Corinthians 2:10-16; Philemon 2:1-5). One cannot “substitute the New Testament for the Old. The Old Testament is the gospel in figures and symbols. The New Testament is the substance. One is as essential as the other.”<sup>1</sup>

There are many important reasons why scholarship is irreplaceable in the Seventh-day Adventist Church, but I will only mention four main ones:

1. We need to advance in the understanding of truth, and it means to be open to new truth. Ellen White underlines that “to the diligent Bible student new light, new ideas, new gems of truth, will constantly appear, and be eagerly grasped. Even through eternal ages the truths of this wonderful book will continue to unfold.”<sup>2</sup> She points out that we cannot maintain our own thoughts but need to submit to God’s revelation and let it correct our thinking: “How shall we search the Scriptures? Shall we drive our stakes of doctrines one after another, and then try to make all Scripture meet our established opinions? Or shall we take our ideas and views to the Scriptures, and measure our theories on every side by the Scriptures of truth?”<sup>3</sup>

2. We need to have ready and solid answers to sophisticated heresies. When strange doctrines and unbiblical teachings arise, we need to face their deceptions with careful exegetical and theological investigation that have to be rooted in the comprehensive, balanced, and advanced understanding of the Scriptures. To stand against apostasy, serious students of the Holy Scriptures have to understand the metanarrative of the Bible, spiritual warfare, and above all, they need to comprehend the biblical view of God’s character. Satan has become very sophisticated in forging the meaning of the Bible, and in distorting God’s actions, so his agents use very complex reasoning that twists truth. This calls for a thorough exploration of the biblical material and the development of biblical-theological thinking.

3. We need revival and reformation in our midst, but they come only as the result of an in-depth study of the Holy Scriptures. Reformation will never occur if there is no diligent study of God’s revealed Word, including





a thorough exploration in the original languages from which springs the right understanding of biblical doctrines. Luther aptly claimed: "The [biblical] languages, therefore, that God did not despise but chose above all others for His Word, we too ought to honor above all others. . . . Let us be sure of this: we shall not long preserve the Gospel without the [knowledge of biblical] languages. The languages are the sheath in which this sword of the Spirit is contained; they are the casket in which we carry this jewel."<sup>4</sup>

4. We are called as the last-day movement (remnant) to rediscover and restore the forgotten or buried biblical teaching; and in doing it, we need to use the best tools available in order to discover truth, love it, follow it, and proclaim it in an attractive way so people can admire and obey God out of gratitude for His marvelous deeds.

Biblical scholars are like physicians or medical specialists who have technical knowledge and skills, but, as in the medical field, there are different levels of knowledge and practical help given by nurses, physician assistants, and paramedics. Thus it is also true with different gifts and knowledge of biblical-theological thinking in God's church. Not all followers of Christ can or should be scholars, but everyone is needed with his or her gifts to advance God's cause. In collaboration is power and working together brings unity. The gift of scholarship is irreplaceable.

Some argue that studying theology is not essential. They point to Jesus and what He did with untrained fishermen. We need to remember, though, that the disciples of Jesus had the best field training with their Master Teacher and Mentor for several years. Consider also how much more God could do with well-educated followers who trusted Him, like Moses, Daniel, or the Apostle Paul! God needs and can use everyone who totally dedicates himself or herself to His service and is willing to enter into His school in which one will constantly learn and advance in the understanding of God's revelation.

People usually say that Bible scholars and theologians only complicate things. Yes, it is true, we sometimes unnecessarily complicate things. However, many issues are not so simple, and they need to be presented in their complexity, in a specific context, and from larger perspectives. One needs to acknowledge one's own limitations and must be willing to learn. On the other hand, often scholars successfully simplify issues so people can see light in the tunnel and navigate through the black forest of difficulties and uncertainties. I am grateful for the Apostle Paul, who wrote many complex things. How incomplete the New Testament would be if we did not have his 13 epistles! However, I also praise the Lord for James, who wrote his beautiful and very practical epistle. People are scared of bad scholarship (and rightly so), but the opposite of poor scholarship is no scholarship or getting rid of it. The contrast to wrong scholarship is **good or faithful** scholarship. We often refer to Jesus' negative statement regarding the scribes and Pharisees: "Woe to you, scribes (teacher of the law) and Pharisees, hypocrites!" (Matthew 23:13). But we forget that He also states that "every scribe [Gr. *grammateus*] who has been trained for the kingdom of heaven is like a master of a house, who brings out of his treasure what is new and what is old" (Matthew 13:52 ESV).

One of the important safeguards for a balanced doctrine is to study Scripture together in order to listen to

each other. Ellen G. White underlines: "We are to counsel together, and to be subject to one another; but at the same time we are to exercise the ability God has given us to learn what is truth. Each one of us must come to God for divine enlightenment. . . . We must not become set in our ideas, and think that no one should interfere with our opinions."<sup>5</sup>

Theology has a twofold purpose—it has to be performed within the Church to help the Church to advance in truth and to formulate truth better (apologetic aspect; defend the truth). Theology and church belong together, because one cannot do biblical theology in isolation. However, theology also has a critical aspect—to help the Church to self-critique and examine itself in order to be sure that her beliefs are really biblically and theologically sound and well formulated.

The example of the Berean believers is a model for the true disciple of Jesus. They were constantly and diligently searching for truth, as they wanted to know the exact meaning of the Sacred Writings, its truths and relevancy: "Now the Berean Jews were of more noble character than those in Thessalonica, for they received the message *with great eagerness and examined the Scriptures every day* to see if what Paul said was true" (Acts 17:11 TNIV; emphasis supplied). Their examination of the Scriptures involved a passionate search to verify that Paul's teaching was rooted and in harmony with Scripture. The reason we need to advance in our knowledge of truth is to learn about the triune God and the Gospel centered in the Lord Jesus Christ (John 5:39–40; Luke 24:27), as this knowledge brings eternal life (John 17:3). An understanding of God's revelation brings freedom (John 8:32) and leads to a total commitment to God to live a pious life in faith, good works, and fulfillment of God's given mission (Matthew 28:19–20; 2 Timothy 3:15–17; Ephesians 2:10; Titus 2:11–13). Thus, the cultivation of love and a passion for truth is a crucial trait of those who walk with the Lord.

Adventist scholarship activities need to foster a culture of excellence and advance the quest for truth. Ellen G. White encourages: "As we take up the study of God's word, we should do so with humble hearts. All selfishness, all love of originality, should be laid aside. Long-cherished opinions must not be regarded as infallible. . . . We have many lessons to learn, and many, many to unlearn. God and heaven alone are infallible. Those who think that they will never have to give up a cherished view, never have occasion to change an opinion, will be disappointed. As long as we hold to our own ideas and opinions with determined persistency, we cannot have the unity for which Christ prayed. . . . Whatever may be man's intellectual advancement, let him not for a moment think that there is no need of thorough and continuous searching of the Scriptures for greater light."<sup>6</sup> With that inspired counsel in mind, Seventh-day Adventist Theological Seminary students and professors seek to do thorough research in order to unlock the richness of the biblical message, the mystery of godliness (1 Timothy 3:16; Ephesians 6:19; Colossians 2:2), and to also unmask the mystery of wickedness and iniquity (Daniel 7–8; 2 Thessalonians 2:7).

Consider prayerfully the following advice: "Ministers should devote time to reading, to study, to meditation and prayer."<sup>7</sup> The following words are not only encouraging, but promise a reward for diligence: "When God opens the way for the accomplishment of a certain

work, and gives assurance of success, the chosen instrumentality must do all in his power to bring about the promised result. In proportion to the enthusiasm and perseverance with which the work is carried forward, will be the success given.”<sup>8</sup>

God’s workers need to be saturated and filled with true knowledge in order to unmask unbiblical teaching: “Neither can they successfully meet the strange forms of error, religious and philosophical combined, to expose which requires a knowledge of scientific as well as Scriptural truth.”<sup>9</sup> She warns that some have “lazy minds,” and “become intellectually lazy,” and laments that “those who do not love to study, are ever in great danger of becoming dwarfs in spiritual and mental growth” instead of being “intellectual giants.”<sup>10</sup>

Calvin rightly encourages believers to have an open and humble attitude toward God’s Word: “Let us understand that God recommends to us the honor and the authority of His Word. As if He said that we must receive in all humility everything contained in Holy Scripture, making ourselves teachable to what is contained in it.”<sup>11</sup> On the entrance wall to the Astronomical Observatory located in Valašské Meziříčí, Czech Republic, is a powerful statement: “A little knowledge leads you to pride, but much knowledge leads you to humility.”

I praise the Lord for godly scholars and their faithful work in enhancing our knowledge of God and His Truth. Our awesome Creator gives gifts—the capacity to think and express thoughts eloquently and communicate truth effectively. Let us use these precious, given talents to God’s glory!



<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *Counsels to Writers and Editors* (Nashville, TN: Southern Publishing Association, 1946), 26.

<sup>2</sup> Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald* (April 6, 1886).

<sup>3</sup> White, *Counsels to Writers*, 36.

<sup>4</sup> Martin Luther, *Works of Martin Luther*, The Philadelphia Edition (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 1982), 4:114.

<sup>5</sup> White, *Counsels to Writers*, 45.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 36–37, 41.

<sup>7</sup> Ellen G. White, *Testimonies for the Church* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1948), 4:412.

<sup>8</sup> Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1943), 263.

<sup>9</sup> Ellen G. White, *Gospel Workers*, (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1948), 81.

<sup>10</sup> Ellen G. White, *Review and Herald* (April 6, 1886); see also *idem*, *Testimonies for the Church*, 4:412–416.

<sup>11</sup> John Calvin, Sermon XXXIII, On the Third Commandment, Deut 5:11. CO 26.281. See also Ellen G. White, *Testimonies to Ministers* (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1962), 90–98.



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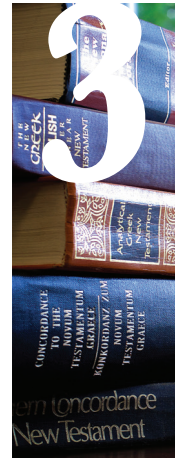
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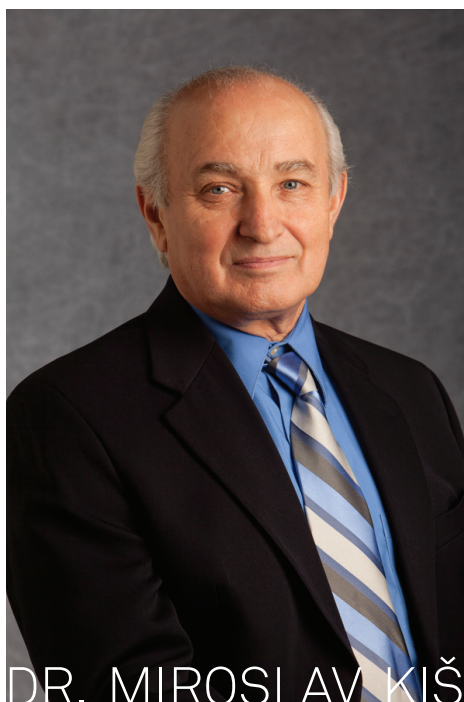
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# COMING **and** GOING



DR. MIROSLAV KIŠ

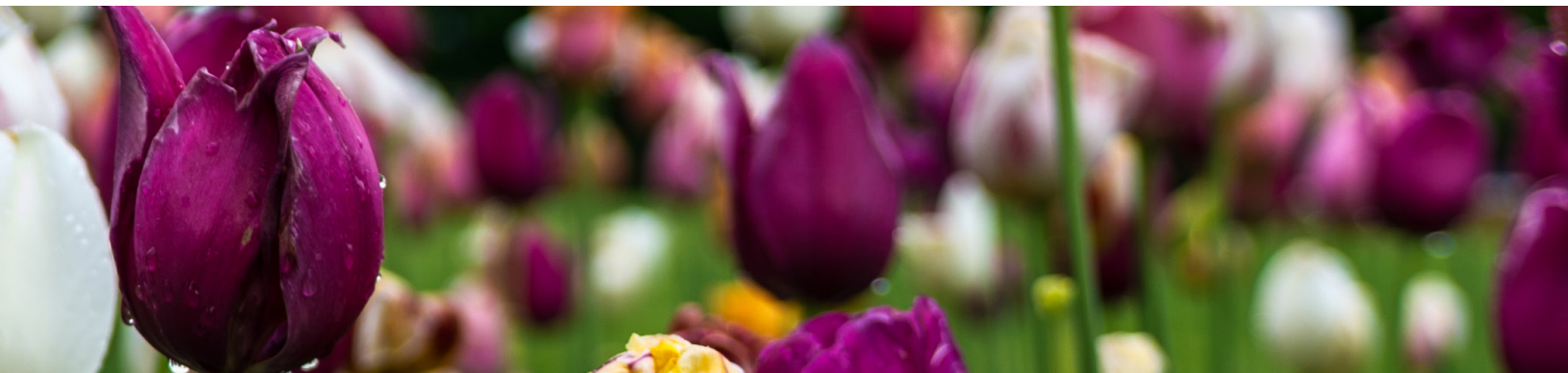


MABEL BOWEN



FRAN MCMULLEN





## OUTGOING

After 32 years, **Dr. Miroslav M. Kiš**, professor of ethics in the Department of Theology & Christian Philosophy, has retired. A grand farewell was held April 30, 2015, for this faithful professor and preacher who was born in Mikluševci, Croatia. His education began under communism in Yugoslavia where he became a professional watchmaker. Later he earned a BA in Theology at Seminaire Adventiste in France, an MDiv at Andrews University in the U.S., and a PhD in Philosophical Ethics (1983) at McGill University in Montreal, Quebec, Canada.

In 1973, Kiš began his ministry in the Seventh-day Adventist Church as pastor and youth director for the Quebec Conference. From there he was called to be assistant professor of religion at Canadian Union College. In 1983, he returned to teach in the Theological Seminary at Andrews University. From 1986 to 2013, he was also the chair of the Department of Theology & Christian Philosophy at the Seminary.

Kiš serves on several standing committees for the General Conference and travels widely as a speaker and consultant on ethical, professional, and theological issues. He has authored one book, "Follow Me," and numerous articles and is currently writing three more books. He and his wife Brenda have been married for over 40 years and enjoy their two adult sons, two daughters-in-law, and three grandchildren.

**Mabel Bowen** retired in June 2015. She has served as the administrative assistant for the PhD in religion and ThD programs for a period of 20 years. She began her service under Dr. Gerhard Hasel (former Seminary dean) and has faithfully served the students, faculty and program directors in this role ever since. Mabel is a true "Mother in Israel" who has helped many, many students through the years of effort required to achieve their PhD. She knows when things should be done and gives ready counsel on how to achieve them. She has a remarkable institutional history of the programs and knows the policies backwards and forwards. Many a professor has said, "Go and do what Mabel tells you to do."

Mabel's abilities go beyond her knowledge of policies, her excellent job of arranging admissions files, comprehensive exams, and faithful taking of minutes for the PhD/ThD committee through the years. Her cheerful smile and ready laugh have lifted many a heart and have helped to make the PhD office a cheerful place for one and all. Her talents and gifts have gone a long way to make the PhD program a success and blessing to the wider Seventh-day Adventist Church. As the current program director, I want to deeply thank Mabel for all her dedicated service. Her service is recognized by all as a key component in the success of many students. She will be missed. *Tom Shepherd, PhD, DrPH, director of PhD in religion and ThD programs.*

**Fran McMullen** will be retiring August 31, 2015 from the Department of Church History, where she has been the administrative assistant, office manager, and general mainstay of the department for the last 17 years. Before that she served for six years in a similar capacity in the theology department. "It has been a wonderful, very fulfilling journey" Fran said adding, "I love the Seminary family. It's been a pleasure working for the diverse faculty and more than anything, it has been a spiritually uplifting experience."

Although Fran is excited about the future, it is bittersweet to say goodbye to so many with whom she has served. Her final words to those who remain and will come after her are: "Be totally open to the faculty and department because they have so much to share. Be completely open to God for there are so many opportunities to serve Him here every day." Following retirement, Fran plans to do some traveling with her husband, Albert (fondly known as Al among the staff, whom he often helps serve dinners and refreshments in the Seminary Commons). She will also continue finding opportunities for service in the Berrien Springs area.

*Jerry Moon, PhD, chair and professor, church history.*

## INCOMING

**Ante Jerončić, PhD**, will join the Seminary faculty as associate professor of theology and Christian ethics, effective July 1, 2015. Jerončić's scholarship and teaching focuses on the intersection of constructive theology and culture, especially as it relates to contemporary ethical and philosophical issues. He also has strong interests in questions concerning the nature of divine providence, the relationship of ethics and aesthetics, the problem of religion and violence, and discussions about human identity and agency in the context of postmodernity. He recently published an article with the *Heythrop Journal* titled "Weak Self-Integration: Jürgen Moltmann's Anthropology and the Postmodern Self," and is currently working on a book project focusing on the idea of apocalyptic consciousness as the organizing motif for an Adventist theology of existence.

Professor Jerončić strongly believes that the depth and relevance of the Adventist faith needs to be communicated in fresh and creative ways both within the Church and the culture at large. He frequently gives lectures and seminars featuring themes such as Adventist identity, discipleship in the modern world, the character of God and human suffering, and the Sermon on the Mount. He is married to Debbie, to whom he feels indebted beyond what words can express.

**Cedric Vine, PhD**, joins the Seminary faculty as associate professor of New Testament, effective January 1, 2016. Vine received his PhD from the University of Sheffield, 2012. His thesis was entitled: "The Audience of Matthew: An Appraisal of the Local Audience Thesis." His MA in religion was obtained in 1999 at Newbold College/Andrews University, where he also received his licence in theology (1997). A BSc (Hons) in managerial & administrative studies from Aston University (1994) rounds out his educational accomplishments.

Vine currently serves at Newbold College of Higher Education, England, where he was also ordained as pastor in 2006. He is chair of the academic board, undergraduate theology program director, and senior lecturer (equivalent of associate professor) in New Testament studies. Some of Vine's papers and publications include: "Action Planning" presented with Dr. J. Baidam at the Educational Oversight Conference (Quality Assurance Agency) on Enhancing Quality and Building Capacity, October 22, 2013; "Listening to the Spirit: Lessons in Decision-Making from the Book of Acts," *Adventist Review*, October 18, 2012; and "Paul's Counsel to a Discouraged Pastor," *Ministry Magazine*, November, 2006.



MAY YOUR  
TEACHING DROP  
AS RAIN, YOUR  
SPEECH DISTILL  
AS THE DEW, LIKE  
GENTLE RAIN  
UPON THE TENDER  
GRASS, AND LIKE  
SHOWERS  
UPON THE HERB  
(DEUTERONOMY 32:2)

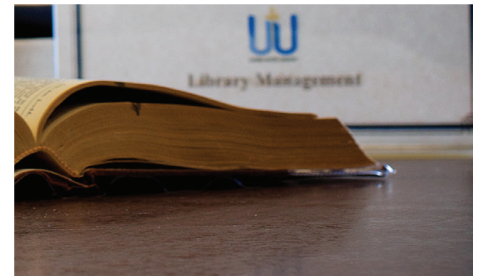
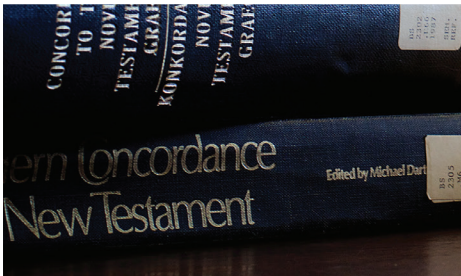
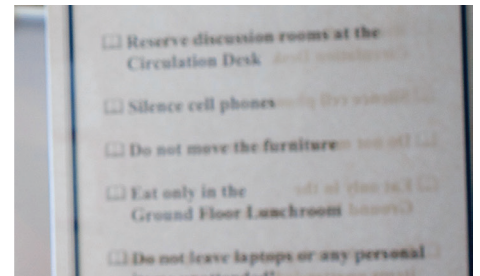
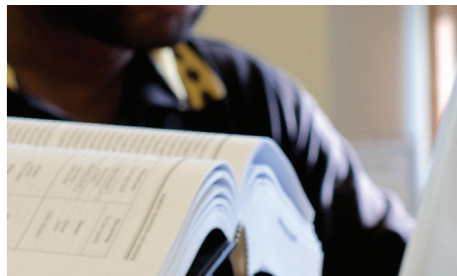


Dr. Bruce Bauer, was recently appointed interim director for the Doctor of Ministry program. He has taught in the Department of World Mission at the Seminary for many years, and is currently the chair of that department. Bauer is the chairperson of the DMin Admissions sub-committee and as of May 1, 2015, assumed the responsibility of interim director following Skip Bell's fifteen years of service as program director.



# NEW TESTAMENT PRECEDENTS TO THE PRACTICE OF CONTEXTUALIZATION IN CONTEMPORARY MISSION

*By Boubakar Sanou*



## Introduction

The biblical revelations were intended to reform or transform the beliefs, values and practices of the peoples to whom they were first addressed, as well as subsequent generations who would choose to follow them (Brown, 2006:127). In real-life situations, missionaries face many problems when it comes to issues dealing with the correlation between the gospel and human cultures (Hiebert, 1985:29). Throughout the history of Christian missions, one of the challenges has been how to be sensitive to different cultures and remain faithful to biblical principles at the same time. Unfortunately, sensitivity to local cultures has sometimes overshadowed faithfulness to biblical principles. Nevertheless, there is

still a need to find ways of being both biblically faithful and culturally relevant in transmitting the principles of the Word of God. If we put emphasis only on biblical coherence, “we are in danger of being ineffective messengers at best, and at worst of communicating a gospel that is misunderstood and distorted” (Hiebert, 1985:141). In mission, we need to present the gospel in such a way that if people reject it, it should not be because it is a misunderstood gospel. Terry Muck and Frances Adeney emphasize that the contextual complexity of many ministry and mission settings requires the use of different approaches instead of a one-size-fits-all approach. To them the biblical record shows that “every time the gospel engages a cultural setting it does so in a unique way” (Muck and Adeney, 2009:34).

## Understanding Contextualization

Contextualization has been defined in several ways over the decades. I find the following two definitions to be the most comprehensive.

Michael Pocock, Gailyn Van Rheenen and Douglas McConnell define contextualization as:

the process whereby Christians adapt the forms, content and praxis of the Christian faith so as to communicate it to the minds and hearts of people with other cultural backgrounds. The goal is to make the Christian faith *as a whole*—not only the message but also the means of living the faith out in the local setting—understandable (Pocock et al., 2005:323, emphasis in the original).

For David Hesselgrave and Edward Rommen, contextualization is the “attempt to communicate the message of the person, works, Word, and will of God in a way that is faithful to God’s revelation, especially as it is put forth in the teachings of Holy Scripture, and that is meaningful to respondents in their respective cultural and existential contexts” (Hesselgrave and Rommen, 1989:200).

Contextualization is therefore a missional strategy concerned with finding appropriate means and methods of presenting the principles of the never-changing Word of God in the context of an ever-changing world in such a way that these principles are correctly understood by each context. As such, contextualization is not a one-time event but an ongoing process.

A number of reasons are given by scholars in favor of the practice of contextualization in mission and ministry. There are also arguments given to discredit the practice because of the risk of syncretism that might be associated with it. However, as stated by Dean Flemming and Paul Hiebert, contextualization is not an option in view of the fact that no single cultural expression of the gospel is ultimate (Flemming, 2005:138), because “all cultures can adequately serve as vehicles for the communication of the gospel” (Hiebert, 1987:55). It has been also argued that contextualization is part of God’s missiology from the time of the fall (Engle, 1983:86) and that “properly understood, the Bible is a record of contextualized revelations; a record of the way God interacted with humans in space-time history in the totality of their contexts” (Musasiwa, 2007:67).

What is argued here is that although the message of Scripture is timeless, its interpretation and application is not. In other words, to interpret and apply the message of the Bible properly, we must not only seek to understand the context of the original hearers but also that of its contemporary audiences. Emphasizing the missiological and theological reality of contextualization, Stephen Bevans emphatically states that among fallen, limited human beings, “there is no such thing as [‘pure’] theology; there is only contextual theology” (Bevans, 2002:3).

### Contextualization in the New Testament

The early church was also faced

with the dilemma of relating the gospel to local contexts. Under the leadership of the Holy Spirit they were able to transcend cultural boundaries in fulfilling the mandate to take the gospel to the ends of the world. Scholars see several examples in the New Testament as precedents to the practice of contextualization in contemporary mission. The following four are explored here: the incarnation of Christ as a foundation of contextualization, *Logos* in reference to Christ, four gospels instead of one, and the decisions of the Jerusalem Council.

### The Incarnation as a Foundation of Contextualization

Richard Engel sees Christ’s incarnation in the first century Jewish cultural setting as a perfect model of contextualization. He observes that Christ’s incarnation as a human being serves as a foundation of “contextualization of God’s message without compromise. By means of the incarnation God perfectly *contextualized* his communication (cf. Hebrews 1-2). He met his target culture where it was and as it was” (Engle, 1983:93, emphasis added). Alluding to Jesus’ incarnation as a foundation of missiological contextualization, Gordon Doss argues that Christ’s “lifestyle would have been somewhat different had he been incarnated into another culture” (Doss, 2007:192). Finally, for Allan Neely, the prologue of John’s Gospel, especially verses 1 and 14, is foundational for understanding the meaning and implications of contextualization. He asserts that the fuller context of John 1:1, 14 “suggests that in Jesus, God identified thoroughly with humankind, and that God came in Jesus for the express purpose of disclosing not only God’s love but also God’s salvific intent for the world (3:16–17)” (Neely, 2000:474). Just as Jesus was incarnated into human culture, so the Apostles applied the incarnational model to the teaching of his Gospel.

### Christ as the *Logos* in John 1:1, 14

John begins his gospel by introducing Jesus as “the Word” (*Logos*). At the time of John, the word *logos* was loaded with different meanings. To the Jews, the *logos* “conveys the notion of divine self-expression or speech (cf. Ps. 19:1-4)” (Köstenberger, 2004:25) or an agent of creation (Psalm 33:6). To Greek philosophers, the *logos* was the principle of reason that ruled the world (Campbell, 1995:395).

With these different understandings, it was unthinkable for Greeks to say that “the *Logos* became flesh,” (John 1:14) because for them “the separation of the divine spirit and the mundane world (flesh, *sarx*) was an axiom of belief” (Burge, 2000:59). For that reason, to say that Jesus took on flesh was to suggest an image of lowliness (Parsenios, 2013:400). For Jews it was blasphemous to state that “the *Logos* was God,” (John 1:1) i.e., inferring “some personal identity between the *Logos* and God” (Burge, 2000:54). It was also shocking for Jews to hear that the *Logos* became flesh and made his dwelling among human beings because “the verb for dwelling is employed in the Greek Old Testament for the tabernacle of God. In other words, Christ is the locus of God’s dwelling with Israel *as he had dwelt with them in the tabernacle in the desert* (Exodus 25:8–9; Zechariah 2:10). Hence the glory of God, once restricted to the tabernacle (Exodus 40:34), is now visible in Christ (John 1:14b)” (Burge, 2000:59).

In this religiously pluralistic context it was a risky creativity for John to introduce Jesus as *Logos* to his audience (both Jews and Gentiles) since each group would be inclined to understand it from their cultural perspective. For John however, “the different understandings proved to be the key to begin a creative dialogue with his context and explain the Jesus tradition through this dialogue” (Sadananda, 2007:367). In this dialogue, John leads his audience to understand the *Logos* not only as a divine creative attribute or as a simple principle of order in the universe, but as a full divine being alongside God. John’s strategy demonstrates the necessity of using cultural concepts, for example, names for God, but infusing them with biblical meaning over time in order to make the proclamation of the gospel contextual, effective and meaningful. For Andreas Köstenberger, in John 1:1–18, John does contextualization by employing universal terms such as “word” and “light” to engage adherents of religions and worldviews in his religiously pluralistic context (Köstenberger, 2004:31). A missional principle derived from this precedent is that the presentation of the timeless message of Scripture must be done “by using the cultural forms, words, and symbols of a people in order to better present that timeless message” (Bauer, 2007:246).



## The Gospels

Why did four biblical authors take it upon themselves to tell the story of Jesus? Flemming answers this question by pointing out that:

If modern Gospel studies have taught us anything, it is that the four Evangelists have narrated the story of Jesus according to *their own theological and literary concerns and in light of how they perceived the needs of their readers*. We might even say that the four Gospels are ‘four contextualizations’ of the one story. *The Gospels, then, form an important piece of the total picture of how the Christian message is reexpressed for new audiences in the New Testament*. (Flemming, 2005:234, emphasis added)

The same story was packaged by each author in a different way for the consumption of a specific audience.

## The Jerusalem Council—Acts 15

By the time of Acts 15, many Gentiles had come to faith in Christ. Their conversion to Christianity raised some fundamental theological questions. According to the account of Acts 15, one

of the issues the early church struggled with was how to admit Gentile believers into full church membership. Was circumcision to be part of the terms on which Gentile converts were to be admitted? After a lengthy discussion they agreed that the Jewish “cultural specificities need not cross over the cultural bridge to the Gentiles” (Doss, 2007:195). Later Paul wrote that “circumcision is nothing and uncircumcision is nothing. Keeping God’s commands is what counts” (1 Corinthians 7:19). Although the council refrained from asking Gentile believers to be circumcised and adopt a Jewish way of life as a prerequisite to full church membership, they were however required “to abstain from food sacrificed to idols, from blood, from the meat of strangled animals and from sexual immorality” (Acts 15:29). Gentiles were allowed to live by their own cultural norms as long as those norms were not in conflict with core biblical teachings.

The early church thus chose cultural diversity over cultural uniformity in faith expression. As a result of this agreement, “church life for Greek disciples was different from church life for Jewish disciples,” and “the cultural differences that exist[ed] between Jewish believers and other believers no longer formed a barrier preventing fellowship between

them” (Brown, 2006:128). A fundamental principle of the Jerusalem Council’s proceedings is that in our cross-cultural missionary endeavors, we always need to distinguish between our cultural baggage and biblical principles.

## Conclusion

Although every culture needs to be transformed by the Spirit and the Word of God (Pierson, 2009:257), it is still essential that the communication of the gospel, in whatever setting, seeks to make the gospel concepts and ideas relevant to people within their own cultures (Hiebert, 1985:55). However, the need to be culturally appropriate always should be closely coupled with an in-depth analysis of the Scriptures. Because “people can only understand that which is part of their cultural frame of reference” (Rogers, 2004:65), the presentation of the gospel must be both biblically sound and culturally relevant in order to be meaningful to the receiving peoples.



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# PROPHETIC PREACHING

*By Hyveth Williams*

Like Leonora Tisdale, “When I mention to friends and acquaintances that I am writing a book on prophetic preaching, the first question I am usually asked is ‘What do you mean by that term?’ If truth be told, that is a highly reasonable question because ‘prophetic’ is currently used in church circles in ways that can be confusing and even conflicting.”<sup>1</sup>

What then is prophetic preaching? It is a form of proclamation that is distinct from preaching prophecy, although prophecy can be preached prophetically. To summarize the complexity of this definition, let’s hear from others who have practiced and written extensively on the subject.

Walter Brueggemann, prolific author, and William Marcellus McPheeters, Professor Emeritus of Old Testament at Columbia Theological Seminary, said: “The task of prophetic ministry is to nurture, nourish and evoke a consciousness and a perception alternative to the consciousness and perception of the dominant culture around us.”<sup>2</sup> He defines “alternative consciousness” as the dismantling of the dominant consciousness of oppression through the power of God, who is allowed to be who He will be, as Moses did with Pharaoh in Egypt. On the other hand, “royal consciousness” is the entrenched political, economic, social, or religious powers that are largely “uninterested in the freedom of God.” Royal consciousness occurs when a king or government sets up temples or places where God is confined and made accessible to or scheduled to meet those who seek Him. Solomon, he claims, “was able to counter completely the counterculture of Moses when he: (1) countered the economics of equality with the economics of affluence, (2) countered the politics of justice with the politics of oppression, (3) countered the religion

of God’s freedom with the religion of God’s accessibility.”<sup>3</sup>

In order for a message to be deemed prophetic, Brueggemann suggests it must comprise two aspects: (a) Radical criticism, defined as the message in which “the assured and alleged power of the dominant culture is now shown to be fraudulent.” He also underscored the fact that, “Criticism is not carping and denouncing. It is asserting that false claims to authority and power cannot keep their promises, which they could not in the face of the free God. It is only a matter of time until they are dead on the seashore”<sup>4</sup> like the Egyptians at the Red Sea. The problem is, however, that “the Solomonic regime [and all future regimens of royal consciousness] was able to silence criticism” in two ways: “One is the way of heavy-handed prohibition that is backed by forceful sanctions (1 Kings 11:10)” and “the prophet is ignored” as “royal” or ruling regimes “develop a natural immunity and remain totally impervious to criticism.”<sup>5</sup>

(b) Energizing “is closely linked to hope.” It rejuvenates the community to fresh forms of faithfulness and vitality to engage the promise of newness at work in our history with God. “We are energized not by that which we already possess, but by that which is promised and about to be given . . . Egypt was without energy precisely because it did not believe anything was promised and about to be given. Egypt, like every imperial and eternal now, believed everything was already given, contained and possessed. If there is any point at which most of us are manifestly co-opted, it is in this way. We do not believe that there will be newness but only that there will be merely moving of the pieces into a new pattern. It is precisely the prophet who speaks against such managed data and who

can energize toward futures that give genuinely new and not derived” future. He also suggests the prophet must speak metaphorically about hope, but concretely about the real newness that comes to redefine our situation, adding, there are “three energizing dimensions: (1) Energy comes from the embrace of the inscrutable darkness. That darkness which is frightening in its authority, appears here in the hardness of heart. (2) In Exodus 11:7 there is a wondrous statement of a new reality that surely must energize when God declared: ‘But against any of the people of Israel, either man or beast, not a dog shall growl, that you may know that the LORD makes a distinction between the Egyptians and Israel.’ (3) The great songs of Song of the Sea (Exodus 15:1–18) and Song of Miriam (Exodus 15:21) are the most eloquent, liberating and liberated songs in Israel. The last energizing reality is a doxology in which the singers focus on this free one and in the act of the song appropriate the freedom of God as their own freedom.”<sup>7</sup>

To Brueggemann’s two components of prophetic preaching (radical criticism and energizing, also described in African American preaching as protest and praise), I have created and added the concept of “Divine Directive,” because a prophetic preacher is not free to challenge a status quo or address issues that may have their genesis in his or her own angst, lack of early childhood developmental needs, or spurious complaints he or she is too cowardly to speak about to power. Their message must be the result of a divine directive with a “thus says the Lord,” as it was with the prophets of old (Obadiah 1:1).

Philip Wogaman, former pastor to the Clintons during their White House years, refers to prophetic preaching as “prophetic witness.” He wrote that,





"To be prophetic is not necessarily to be adversarial, or even controversial. The word in its Greek form refers to one who speaks on behalf of another. In Hebrew tradition, a prophet is one who speaks for God."<sup>8</sup>

Dawn Ottoni-Wilhelm, Alvin F. Brightbill Professor of Preaching and Worship, Bethany Theological Seminary, stated that, "Prophetic preaching proclaims God's Word from within the Christian tradition against all that threatens God's reconciling intention for humanity and for all that creates and sustains a vital and necessary ministry of compassion to neighbors near and far." She adds that, "Because it is not exclusively either moral exhortation or predictions regarding future events, prophetic preaching envisions past, present and future concerns within the context of the reign of God realized in Jesus Christ and empowered by the Holy Spirit."<sup>9</sup>

Marvin McMickle, president and professor of church leadership, Colgate Rochester Crozer Divinity School, whom I have the good fortune of calling friend, affirms Brueggemann's definition of "royal consciousness," saying it "represents 'the deeply entrenched forces—political, economic, social or religious—of Israel.'" Then he adds emphatically, "They are the status quo, and they only offer to people a vision of the future that allows them to remain in power and requires that masses of people remain marginalized in society. The work of the prophet," therefore, "is to combat that single vision and show that God can and will bring about a future different from that envisioned by the ruling elite."<sup>10</sup>

McMickle and his colleagues are not suggesting that a prophetic preacher is combative and is always in conflict with society. There was a time when this was the general consensus about prophetic preaching. In fact,

according to Stephen D. Long, "the assumption held by many preachers [was] that to preach prophetically is to side for justice against charity, to be prophetic against pastoral preaching." To correct the misunderstanding, "The following notions provide an alternative to the dominant consensus: (1) the prophetic preacher stands under the community of faith; he or she is not set over and against it. (2) To be prophetic is not in opposition to being pastoral. Prophetic preaching is the most pastoral of activities [because it focuses on the small and large concerns of the community]. (3) Prophetic preaching is never discontinuous with the past, but finds resources internal to the tradition of the community of faith to call that community to its true identity."<sup>11</sup>

John S. McClure, Charles G. Finney Professor of Preaching and Worship, Vanderbilt Divinity School, defined prophetic preaching as "an imaginative re-appropriation of traditional narratives and symbols for the purpose of critiquing a dangerous and unjust present situation and providing an alternative vision of God's future."<sup>12</sup>

Leonora Tisdale, Clement-Muehl Professor of Homiletics, Yale Divinity School, whose book on the subject was my very first introduction to this wonderful, powerful method and style of proclamation, provides "seven hallmarks of prophetic preaching: (1) it is rooted in the biblical witness: both in the testimony of the Hebrew prophets of old and in the words and deeds of the prophet Jesus of Nazareth. (2) Prophetic preaching is countercultural and challenges the status quo. (3) Prophetic preaching is concerned with the evils and shortcomings of the present social order and is often more focused on corporate and public issues than on individual and personal concerns. (4) Prophetic preaching requires the preacher to name both

what is not of God in the world (criticizing) and the new reality God will bring to pass in the future (energizing). (5) Prophetic preaching offers hope of a new day to come and the promise of liberation to God's oppressed people. (6) Prophetic preaching invites courage in its hearers and empowers them to work to change the social order. (7) Prophetic proclamation requires of the preacher a heart that breaks with the things that break God's heart; a passion for justice in the world; the imagination, conviction, and courage to speak words from God; humility and honesty in the preaching moment; and a strong reliance on the presence and power of the Holy Spirit."<sup>13</sup>

According to these definitions, prophetic preaching is a homiletical genre in which divine authority is exercised in the mode, if not exact manner, of Old Testament prophets to: (a) critically question the status quo, (b) speak truth to power, (c) offer biblical/theological insights into current situations, (d) challenge listeners to repent, and (e) exercise God's righteousness as well as His justice. It is the one method and style designed to shift the focus of a community of faith from what may or may not be impacting or affecting their lives immediately to what will ultimately do so. Prophetic messages also redirect the attention of listeners from that which is happening in their immediate, local existence to the wider society.

Marvin McMickle<sup>14</sup> also reminds us that prophetic preaching points out the false gods of comfort, luxury, fame, and fortune and encourages worshipers away from the lack of concern as a brother or sister's keeper; from acquiescence to infringing religious or social evils, such as narcissistic pleasures and materialism, that vie for and even usurp the role, place, and power of the God of Scripture in the lives of

His people. It calls true believers to actively pursue justice and righteousness for every member of society, no matter what the personal cost. Prophetic preaching never allows the community of faith to believe that mere participation in the rituals of its religious life can ever be adequate substitutes for that form of ministry that is designed to uplift “the least of these” (Matthew 25:40), Christ’s brothers and sisters in the world.

Under divine unction and instruction, prophetic preaching must condemn those who exploit the poor as did Old Testament prophets such as Amos and Micah. They condemned Israel for being more interested in sacrificing animals and observing feasts and days while ignoring the economic exploitation and subsequent cries of the poor. For instance, the Israelites were commanded by God to hold sacred assemblies, observe the seventh-day Sabbath, and offer sacrifices (Exodus 12:16; Numbers 10:2; 1 Chronicles 23:31). However, the time came when God, repulsed by the lawlessness of His people, declared His disgust through His prophet (cf. Isaiah 1:13 *New Living Translation*).

I am passionate about prophetic preaching. In the words of Walter Brueggemann, “I am drawn to prophetic witness, in the first instance, because I believe that the prophets of God—both in ancient times and today—have been harbingers of hope, naming reality as it is and placing before us a vision of the new future God will bring to pass.”<sup>15</sup> But where are the prophets to challenge the Christian Church today, to reclaim its God-given role of speaking truth to power while calling God’s people “to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?” (Micah 6:8). McMickle suggests that they are “Gone in search of mega churches, everyone ... Gone in search of faith-based funding ... Gone in search of personal comfort ... Gone in search of political correctness ... Gone into a ministry that places praise over speaking truth to power ... when will they ever learn?”<sup>16</sup> Such pastors, he reported, have either become “patriot pastors,”<sup>17</sup> who worship with up stretched hands in praise, but do not also become outstretched hands to lift a fallen brother or sister, and that, he says indignantly, is an abomination to God. McMickle also opined that, while conservative evangelicals focus on their two-pronged agenda of abortion and same-sex marriage, chief executive officers are looting companies too big

to fail, not caring that they are leaving workers and retirees in financial ruin. As important as this two-pronged agenda may be, prophetic preachers must broaden their message to include the abuse of insider trading by politicians as well as the exploitation and fleecing of the poor via prosperity gospel that has weaseled its way into the Christian pulpit. Prophetic preaching in the 21st century must answer three important questions:

(1) By what authority is the speaker preaching? Not only will the congregants know if one is faking a divine directive, the devils will also recognize it. Therefore, a prophetic preacher must avoid being like the seven sons of Sceva (Acts 19:11–15). A prophetic preacher must be like Jeremiah (1:9–10), confident of his or her divine directive to speak truth to power and name the realities of people’s living condition with authority, regardless of the personal repercussions.

(2) What exactly is the content of the prophetic message? Is it dealing with trivial or difficult issues? Does it “lack substance, or [is it] what Spurgeon called ‘treacle’ and H.H. Farmer, ‘French lacquer preaching’?”<sup>18</sup> Does it lack coherence? “If the preacher has mastered Freshman Composition, the message may possess internal coherence, but externally, the sermon does not look to the rock from which it was hewn. It coheres to nothing.”<sup>19</sup> If one focuses on the evil acts of the royal consciousness regimes, but fails to point the listener to the awesome, redemptive power of the God who makes the crooked places straight (Isaiah 45:2), that sermon may tickle the ears (2 Timothy 4:3–4), but it will not bring about the salvific, energizing purposes of prophetic preaching. “The preacher may present a charming and literate discourse, but, because the speech does not emerge from or rearticulate the organizing principles of the church’s life—its theology—because it does not offer the life of God in Christ, it suffers the same fate as the seed sown on the rocky soil. But in this case, its rootlessness derives from the preacher’s rather than the hearer’s lack of depth.”<sup>20</sup>

(3) Can prophetic preaching accomplish the challenge of preaching ethics? To do this, the prophetic preacher must consistently filter observations and answer questions, such as the following, through theological/biblical perspectives: (a) Where have the people gone wrong? (b) What role did the leaders play in their error? (c) How

have they turned away from God? (d) Where have they strayed from covenant living? (e) What can they do to restore a fractured relationship with the God who created and called them?

It is further evident that in our 21st century Christian community with its proliferation of denominations and non-denominational venues of worship, there are more false than true prophetic preachers. These false prophets bring a whitewashed word that is compromising, superficial, and verbose. Prolific author and preacher, Barbara Brown Taylor, says they are the preachers who are promising a smooth road that goes around the wilderness rather than one that leads people through the wilderness with its rough places, crooked paths, and low moments. In one of his sermons, the Rev. Charles Edward Booth remarked that false prophets abound because “the church has disintegrated into a group of people who no longer have a prophetic word ... we have too many cowards in the pulpit.” A true prophetic preacher, however, does not mince words. She or he boldly calls the people out of their idolatries and false hopes because the goal is redemption and the purpose is restoration in Christ. They preach about a God who is known by them, can be known by all, and who can be trusted in all things.

However, prophetic preachers must be more than gunslingers (vigilantes or persons who act in aggressive and decisive manners). Again, Tisdale said, “For many preachers ... prophetic preaching is the most difficult kind of preaching we do,” adding that some equate it “with head-on, confrontational preaching.”<sup>21</sup> While it is the responsibility of such preachers to “afflict the comfortable and comfort the afflicted,”<sup>22</sup> they must always leave the congregation with hope in the redemptive power and tenderness of God exhibited in the story of the Father’s love for His sons in Luke 15:11–32.



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## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> *Prophetic Preaching: A Pastoral Approach*, 3.

<sup>2</sup> *The Prophetic Imagination*, 13.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid, 30.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid, 31.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid, 14–16.

<sup>8</sup> *Speaking the Truth in Love: Prophetic Preaching to a Broken World*, 3.

<sup>9</sup> Quoted in *Anabaptist Preaching: A Conversation Between Pulpit, Pew & Bible*, 77.

<sup>10</sup> *Where Have All The Prophets Gone?*, 11.

<sup>11</sup> *Concise Encyclopedia of Preaching*, 388.

<sup>12</sup> *Preaching Words: 144 Key Terms in Homiletics*, 117.

<sup>13</sup> *Prophetic Preaching: A Pastoral Approach*, 10.

<sup>14</sup> *Where Have All The Prophets Gone?*, 2–3.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid, 8.

<sup>17</sup> McMickle describes patriot pastors as those whose allegiance is to a political party instead of God. A few years ago, one such pastor in North Carolina disfellowshipped nine members of his church because they didn't obey him and vote for George Bush.

<sup>18</sup> *A Theology of Preaching: The Dynamics of the Gospel*, 1–2.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> A turn of phrase whose popularity is attributed to the late E.E. Cleveland.

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# CALLED TO POWER?

ERROL MCLEAN

This article is written to spark discussion on the view and use of power in the church. We have many great spiritual and selfless leaders at all levels in the church whom Ellen White describes as, “Men who cannot be bought or sold but are as true to duty as the needle is to the pole.”<sup>1</sup> We have men and women who are convicted about their call to a ministry of service at the most basic levels in the church. There are administrators and pastors in many remote places, serving with heartfelt conviction that ministry is a calling to lift up Christ and not self. There are also students in our colleges and seminaries who are not fascinated by the trappings of power, but are passionate about self-sacrificing service in the most rudimentary positions and isolated places. It is observable, however, that some church leaders misuse the power that is inherent in their position to exalt self and not Christ.

My aim is to generate a thoughtful dialogue about how easily power can be misused in the church, with the hope that this recognition will call us back from the edge of the abyss to once again embrace ethical, biblical leadership. The hope is that leaders will accept God’s call to ministry with their hearts aflame, determined to serve wherever God places them; and to work with humility, compassion, and the absence of self-centered pride. Too many pastors and administrative leaders seem to have forgotten

that they were called to a ministry of self-sacrificing service and not for self-promotion and professional advancement.

The call to pastoral ministry is identified as “not from human origin but of divine instigation. This uniqueness of ministry is due to its divine appointment and means that it is more than a profession, it is a calling”<sup>2</sup>

## Lessons from the Monarchy

The experience of Saul, Israel’s first king, provides an instructive parallel to the dangers faced by those called and entrusted with power by God to lead. The call of Saul reveals how a divine empowerment to lead often begins with a great sense of awe and personal unworthiness, but can deteriorate into a corrupt attitude of entitlement and abuse of power (1 Samuel 10:20–27). Wiest and Smith in “Ethics in Ministry” state that at ordination, the clergy receives “sacred power.” Sacred power is then abused when it is treated as though it were the clergy’s personal possession.<sup>3</sup> Raymond Edwards in “Power and the Pastor: How to Build Power and use it Wisely,” states how the acquisition and exercising of power in religious ministry is not only dynamic and delicate, but also potentially dangerous. It is patently obvious that no one called to ministry is immune to the risk of the abuse of power that is inherent in ministry positions.<sup>4</sup>

## Initial Humility

The humility of Saul’s initial response to his divine calling and appointment reflects two factors identifiable in the response of most individuals to their initial calling to pastoral ministry:

1. The calling is to a divine task that it is impossible to fulfill using human abilities alone;

2. The pastor is called from among his/her peers. This calling involves a divine empowerment to influence and provide spiritual leadership for those from among whom he/she is called.

These two factors can produce a sense of personal unworthiness for such divine empowerment. Notice Saul’s reaction when called from among his peers. He felt so unworthy for this divine task that he left his peers and went “lower,” to hide among ordinary stuff. One moment Saul was just one among his peers, and the next moment people were honoring him, giving accolades and shouting “God save the king.”

Saul responded to this sudden transition and empowerment by hiding from his peers, and quietly returning home. He also chose not to be offended by the animosity of those who rejected him. There was a certain sense of timidity and naiveté in these responses. It is as if power and privilege had been too suddenly thrust on him. Awkward and uncertain, he shied away from embracing the power, almost as if





power  
looks like in  
the church.

model  
of servant  
leadership.

he  
sensed  
its corrosive nature.

The incidences surrounding Saul's call suggests that, though he was given a position of power, he had not yet grasped the power of the position. His humility and hesitant embrace of power at his calling is completely opposite to the arrogance, pride, and abuse that he showed a few short years into his leadership.

I still recall the sense of passion and wonderment at my own initial calling by God to pastoral ministry. The intense joy I experienced at my appointment to full-time ministry employment. The reason for my joy was not only that God had called and prepared me for ministry, but also that my God-given influence had the potential to transform lives and bring souls to Christ. I recall my sense of bashful amazement that mature adults would listen to me and choose to be spiritually influenced by my service and ministry.

### The Corporate Mindset

I meet some young people today who have a heartfelt acceptance that true ministry is about providing spiritual leadership, service, and influence. They see the goal of this servant leadership model as the transformation of people by bringing them into a saving relationship with Christ. There are others, unfortunately, who see ministry as an accumulation of power and privilege, based on the continuous attainment of "higher" positions in the organization of the church. Many of us are also painfully aware of the unhealthy use of influence and power that occurs at all levels of the church during the election of leaders and ministry personnel. The model they display is that successful ministry is attached to the largest churches, the conference offices, and other administrative positions in the hierarchy of the church. This self-centered approach to ministry is resulting in abuses of power and the display of pride in position. It is not representative of Christ's

Many years ago, a union president whom I greatly admired, met me in the corridors during a General Conference session and proudly informed me that he had been promoted to a "higher position" at the division. This response by an individual who, to all appearance was a sincere and godly leader, warned me of the insidious, corrupting nature of position and power. I saw how easily one can be enticed to seek position and power rather than God's will. This is particularly so as the church appears to value "higher positions of power" rather than the call to ministry and service by the local pastor. Exley notes that the corrosive attraction of power is when it comes disguised as ministry. This is when it is perceived as an opportunity to do something important for God. The potential to abuse power is present in everyone, and it is not necessarily true humility that often keeps it in check, but rather a lack of opportunity.<sup>6</sup>

The kingship of Saul provides valuable insight into the dynamics of misguided leadership. The important individual question to be answered, is this: With which Saul do I most identify?

- The hesitant and naïve Saul? (1 Samuel 10: 21–27)
- The confident, God-empowered Saul? (1 Samuel 11:6–15)
- The despotic, self-reliant, power-hungry, and power-abusing Saul seeking to destroy all other perceived rivals for the throne? (1 Samuel 13:7–1 Samuel 31)

### Does Power Still Corrupt Inside the Church?

A brief look at a couple of definitions for power will help create an understanding of the corrosive nature of power and its impact on a call to ministry. Power is described as:

- Great or marked ability to do or act; strength; might; force.<sup>7</sup>
- Possession of control, authority, or influence over others.<sup>8</sup>

These two definitions provide a general context for understanding what

Secular power positions are often accompanied by very attractive financial compensation, with privileges and perks. Power positions in the church are, however, not attached to financial compensation that is particularly higher than others. The perceived reward is, therefore, not pay, but positions of control, command, and authority. The church has created its own currency of value, which is pride of ascendant positions in a pecking order. This involves esteem, influence, and recognition to be called "first among equals."

Raymond Edwards observes that some churches often support power positions with certain physical structures and trappings to consolidate and signal the power of the position. These perks and benefits are often disguised as essentials for effectively delivering ministry. At the level of the local church, these can be reserved parking spaces, private toilet facilities, personal telephone lines, credit cards, and personal deacon escorts. These appurtenances can be rationalized as simple conveniences to facilitate ministry, but, in effect, they are exclusive privileges that consolidate and signal the power, priority, and primacy of our positions.<sup>9</sup>

### Power and Positions

Power positions in the church are associated with control over resources, as well as the welfare of one's peers. Another view of the early King Saul reveals a leader, not self-serving in his control over resources, nor vindictive concerning the welfare of his peers who had rejected him. It is this Saul that demonstrates the potential God identified when He initially called this future king from among his peers and from his hiding place (1 Samuel 10:20–22 & 1 Samuel 11). Unlike this Saul, many church administrators act to create and maintain positions of power rather than act to enhance their quality of service in ministry.

### Dangers for the Church

The church today is not threatened so much by outside forces of power, but by the despiritualizing process caused by our new valued currency of pride in ascendancy over one's

peers. Power positions are sought and retained not so much for service, but for influence, recognition, and esteem. This process is resulting in cynicism, vindictive behaviors, and a failure to view the church as the spiritual body of Christ. Ministry then focuses on personal ambitions, rather than service and mission.

Exley notes that personal ambition in the pastor can be justified as a vision for the kingdom, a divine call, or the following of God's will. The mixing of power and pride is a combustible mixture.<sup>11</sup> The danger lies in the conflating of our personal egos with the illusion that divine empowerment compels us to use our ill-gotten influence for God's cause.

The role of the pastor is also de-emphasized. The more value given to the new currency we have created, the less value is attached to pastoral calling at its basic level of service to a congregation. The call to "ministry" becomes a call to seek power positions instead of a call to pastoral service. Pastors, then, can simply become pawns, or shrewd professionals at the process of gaining these power positions.

This is not the biblical servant leadership model of Christ. The church is increasingly failing to appeal to a cynical generation, because her structures, values, and culture reflect those of the world. When the world no longer views the church as morally and

ethically different, then those who are looking for examples of Christlikeness are disillusioned by the new norm.

During my early pastoral years I recall my incredulity at the un-Christlike responses of some local elders during the yearly nominating committee process. Today there exists similar or worse attitudes of political machinations and the pursuit of power at the election processes in our conferences, unions, and divisions. This unsanctified, positional, power culture is becoming ingrained in the church at all levels.

### Personal Responsibility

There is a danger that persons called to power can be coerced by the corrosive nature of that power. Matthew 10:20–28 records how Jesus' disciples, James and John, were grasping for positions of power. This caused the other ten to be angry at this obvious power grab. Jesus responded by making it clear that the calling to ministry is not a call to positions of power, but to positions of service. His counsel is opposite to the approach that seeks prestige and privileges from power positions. Christlikeness in ministry is to serve and not to be served.

The priesthood of all believers values the call to service for all believers, and reduces the hierarchical focus on power positions. The role and position of local pastors will be valued equally with the role and positions

of administrative leaders. To identify one's sense of self by the power of the position rather than by the privilege of service, leads to abuse of power and devalues pastoral ministry.

Jesus' context for persons called to ministry is to "know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and those who are great exercise authority over them. Yet it shall not be so among you; but whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. And whoever desires to be first among you, let him be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many."<sup>13</sup> Christ is calling for a culture of transformative servant leadership committed to service, not self-service.



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### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> Ellen G. White, *Education* (Mountain View CA: Pacific Press Publishing Assn., 1952), 57.

<sup>2</sup> *Seventh-day Adventist Minister's Handbook* (Silver Spring, MD: Ministerial Association General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 2009), 15.

<sup>3</sup> Walter Wiest, Elwyn Smith, *Ethics in Ministry: A Guide for the Professional* (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1990), 60.

<sup>4</sup> Raymond S. Edwards, *Power and The Pastor: How to Build Power and Use it Wisely* (MOHDC, 2005).

<sup>5</sup> Richard Exley, *Perils of Power* (Silver Spring, MD: Ministerial Association General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1995), 66.

<sup>6</sup> Power. 2013. In *Dictionary.com*, Retrieved September 17, 2013, from <http://dictionary.reference.com/browse/power?s=t>

<sup>7</sup> Power. 2013. In *Merriam-Webster.com*. Retrieved September 17, 2013, from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/power>

<sup>8</sup> Raymond S. Edwards, *Power and The Pastor: How to Build Power and Use it Wisely* (MOHDC, 2005).

<sup>9</sup> Richard Exley, *Perils of Power* (Silver Spring, MD: Ministerial Association General Conference of Seventh-day Adventists, 1995), 62.

<sup>10</sup> Matthew 20:25–28.





# SCHOOLS OF THE PROPHETS PARADIGM FOR PASTORAL EDUCATION

By Richard M. Davidson

## Introduction

This essay examines the biblical data and counsels from the writings of Ellen White regarding the schools of the prophets, exploring how the Old Testament “schools of the prophets” paradigm might serve as a model for our pastoral education today.

**A. Why use the Schools of the Prophets as a “Divine Paradigm” for pastoral education?** Ellen White writes: “Our schools are to be as the schools of the prophets” (PH 145, Page 47). “The youth should be encouraged to attend our training schools for Christian workers, which should become *more and more like the schools of the prophets....* Some will be trained to enter the field as ...gospel ministers” (8T 230, italics supplied here and elsewhere for emphasis). “You should endeavor to train the *very best class of workers*, who as teachers and ministers of the gospel will be able to educate others. All who are now connected with the work of education must not follow the same, same, old methods. *Our schools should be more after the order of the schools of the prophets*” (PH 158, “Testimonies Relating to Emmanuel Missionary College,” Page 7).

**B. Biblical passages referring to the “band of prophets” (time of Samuel) or “sons of the prophets” (time of Elijah and Elisha):** 1 Samuel 10:5, 10–13; 19:18–20; 2 Kings 2:1–18; 4:1–7, 38–41; 6:1–7; 9:1–10. The biblical text does not explicitly call these “bands” of the “sons of the prophets” schools, but the narratives make clear that such was their intended function (see 1 Samuel 19:18–20; 2 Kings 4:38; 6:1).

## Schools of the Prophets Paradigm

### I. Origin and Overall Goal of the Schools of the Prophets

The original divine purpose for the

education of Israel was through the family structure, just as this structure was designed to be the fabric of society as a whole. But during the time of the Judges the moral fabric of society deteriorated dramatically (Judges 21:25—“everyone did what was right in his own eyes;” 1 Samuel 3:1—“the word of the Lord was rare in those days”). Even the High Priest’s sons apostatized (1 Samuel 2:22), and God raised up Samuel to be a teacher (as well as prophet/seer, priest and judge) in Israel (see 1 Samuel 10:5, 10–13; 7:16, 17). Under God’s direction, Samuel founded “schools” called “bands of prophets” to train men qualified as leaders and counselors in Israel, to instruct the people in the ways and works of God (1 Samuel 19:18–20; Samuel is described as “leader” [Hebrew *natsab*, *Nif*. ptc.] over them; cf. Ed, Page 46). These schools were thus designed for those who “desired to search deeper into the truths of the word of God, and to seek wisdom from above” (PP, Page 635). These schools continued to function under the direction of Elijah and Elisha (2 Kings 2–9) and the students, then called “sons of the prophets,” were not actually prophets in the strict sense of the term, but students of the prophets receiving training for ministerial leadership in Israel. Ezra appears to have revived schools of the prophets after the Exile (see below under IV. B.).

### II. Entry Requirements

*Deep spirituality, high mental acumen and academic excellence* were expected. This is implicit in the biblical narratives describing students at these schools, and explicit in Ed, Page 46: “Samuel gathered companies of young men who were *pious, intelligent, and studious*. These were called the schools of the prophets.”

Age requirements are not explicitly

stated, but the schools of the prophets included at least some married students (2 Kings 4:1).

### III. Faculty Qualifications

The character profiles in the biblical narratives of Samuel, Elijah and Elisha—the explicitly named teachers in the schools of the prophets—provide a picture of teachers who (1) were well versed in Scripture; (2) maintained a close personal communion with God (a “progressive Christian experience,” FE, Page 223); (3) had received a special endowment of the Holy Spirit; and (4) were respected and trusted by the people for their learning and their spirituality. [See Ed, Page 46 for this fourfold summation.]

Ellen White further characterizes the teachers in the schools of the prophets (as well as what they should be like today): “There should be unselfish, devoted, faithful teachers, teachers who are constrained by the love of God, and who, with hearts full of tenderness, will have a care for the health and happiness of the students. It should be their aim to advance the students in every essential branch of knowledge” (6T, Page 152; cf. Pages 152–161 for a summary of the essential qualification of teachers in our colleges and seminaries). She especially points out the need for humility on the part of the teachers today, like in the schools of the prophets: “When teachers are willing to sit in the school of Christ and learn of the Great Teacher, they will know far less in their own estimation than they do now. When God becomes the teacher, He will be acknowledged, His name will be magnified. The students will be as were the young men in the schools of the prophets, upon whom the Spirit of God came, and they prophesied” (CT, Page 373).



#### IV. Curriculum

##### A. Central focus upon Scripture.

Ellen White provides insight that in the schools of the prophets the students were not taught from the “study books that were in the common schools,” but focused upon Scripture and upon “knowledge of Jesus Christ” (Spalding and Magan Collection, Page 357). “Holy Scriptures were the essential study in the schools of the prophets” (“The Advocate,” 2/1/1900). In the school of the prophets, “the Word of God [was] lying at the foundation of all” (“Pacific Union Recorder,” 8/13/1914).

##### B. “Chief subjects [not just sources] of study.”

By the time of Samuel, there existed at least the Torah and parts of the Former Prophets or Historical books (Joshua and probably Judges and Ruth) and, by the time of Elijah and Elisha, perhaps more of the Historical books (Samuel and part of Kings?) and some Hymnic/Wisdom literature (much of Psalms and Proverbs; Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes). Thus, the study material for the schools of the prophets included Torah, the record of God’s mighty acts in salvation history, collections of inspired psalms and poetry. Ellen White summarizes (Ed, Page 47): “*The chief subjects of study in these schools were the law of God, with the instruction given to Moses, sacred history, sacred music, and poetry*”). When Ezra re-established the schools of the prophets after the Exile (this may be implied in the description of him as “a skilled scribe in the Law of Moses” [Ezra 7:6] and his public teaching of the Law [Ezra 8:1–12]; see 3 BC, Page 1134: “Ezra . . . became a teacher of the law and the prophecies in the schools of the prophets”), the Scriptures then included virtually all of the Old Testament. This inspired biblical material is thoroughly Christ-centered (including the typological focus of the sanctuary services and liturgy and hymnody, and the various lines of Messianic prophecies in the prophets).

##### C. A balanced focus upon doctrine (truth), ethics (goodness) and aesthetics (beauty).

The inspired, single-minded quest of David, as described in Psalm 27 (Verse 4: “One thing . . . will I seek”), is an intentional focus upon what the philosophers have called the “triple star of value” in human life: beauty (Verse 4: “to behold the beauty [no’ am] of the Lord”), truth (Verse 4: “to enquire [baqar, to diligently investigate the truth of a matter] in

his temple”), and goodness (Verse 13: “the goodness of the Lord”). Ellen White relates this three-fold focus to the curriculum and methodology of the schools of the prophets and what is needed in today’s education: “How wide the difference between those schools taught by the prophets of God and our modern institutions of learning! . . . Were this principle [the call to excellence] given the attention which its importance demands, there would be a radical change in some of the current methods of education. Instead of appealing to pride and selfish ambition, kindling a spirit of emulation, teachers would endeavor to awaken the love for *goodness and truth and beauty*—to arouse the desire for excellence” (PP, Pages 594–595). A curriculum balancing these values will contain not only an emphasis upon doctrine (truth), ethics (goodness), but also aesthetics (beauty). This is modeled in the schools of the prophets in their subject areas of study: doctrine and ethics highlighted in the legal and historical portions of Scripture, and aesthetics underscored in the sacred music and poetry.

##### D. Emphasis on character development.

A close reading of the narratives related to the schools of the prophets reveals a deep spirituality pervading these educational institutions. Both of Saul’s encounters with the “bands of prophets” finds a group of students filled with the Spirit, so much so that their experience envelops and “charges” the visitor with some of that same Spirit (1 Samuel 10:5–10; 19:20–24). Ellen White elaborates on the spiritual tone and its powerful effects in these schools: “*The school of the prophets was a special school to get the endowment of the Holy Spirit of God and then go forth into the dark places of the earth and seek for those who would listen to the testimony that they had to bring*” (Loma Linda Messages, Page 535). Again, “It [the Holy Spirit] came into the schools of the prophets, bringing even the thoughts into harmony with the will of God. There was a *living connection between heaven and these schools*; and the joy and thanksgiving of loving hearts found expression in songs of praise in which angels joined” (CT, Pages 67–68). “*The Holy Spirit was eagerly sought for in the schools of the prophets*” (RH 9/3/1908).

The character development of the students in the schools of the prophets was of a very practical nature.

The biblical narratives give insights into their daily experience in the days of Samuel and Elijah and Elisha, and reveal that the students were receiving knowledge of practical godliness, learning to trust God in experiences of hardship and challenge. Ellen White summarizes the practical side of the training: “*A spirit of devotion was cherished. Not only were the students taught the duty of prayer, but they were taught how to pray, how to approach their Creator, how to exercise faith in Him, and how to understand and obey the teachings of His Spirit*” (Ed, Page 47). She further expresses the wish that Christian educators today may “bring into our schools the spirituality that was seen in the schools of the prophets” (PH 145, Page 46).

##### E. Corporate worship, involving sacred music.

Special emphasis was placed upon corporate worship and, in particular, praise of God in sacred music. Saul finds the students of the school “prophesying . . . with a stringed instrument, a tambourine, a flute, and a harp before them” (1 Samuel 10:5). Ellen White elaborates on the importance of music instruction and music in the worship experience of the schools of the prophets (see PP, Pages 593–594). She describes an occasion at Battle Creek College when the Holy Spirit’s manifestation was similar to the times when the Spirit was poured out on the students in the schools of the prophets in the days of Samuel (1 Samuel 10:5–10), and then adds: “The Lord would be glorified if hallelujahs of rejoicing were heard in our schools” (Special Testimonies on Education, Page 79). Summarizing the importance of musical training in the curriculum, she writes: “*The art of sacred melody was diligently cultivated in those schools of the prophets*.” This involved “sacred, solemn, psalms of praise to the Creator, exalting His name and recounting His wondrous works.” Such music served a “holy purpose, to lift the thoughts to that which was pure and noble and elevating, and to awaken in the soul, devotion and gratitude to God” (ST 6/22/1882).

**F. Evangelistic outreach:** A striking example of evangelistic outreach by personal influence is found among the school of the prophets narratives in Scripture: Saul’s contact with the students in the school leads to his conversion (1 Samuel 10:5–12; Verse 6: [when Saul met the prophesying/praising students he was] “turned into another man”). Other examples in the lives of Elijah and Elisha and their



students represent outreach spreading a divine influence beyond the confines of their school: Elijah anointing Hazael king of Damascus (1 Kings 19:15; 2 Kings 8:8–15); Elisha's contact with and instrumentality in the conversion of Naaman, commander of the Syrian army (2 Kings 5); and the student of Elisha being sent to anoint King Jehu (2 Kings 9:1–13).

Ellen White catches the impact of these accounts and application for today, and counsels: *"Let the workers be educated as were the youth in the schools of the prophets....Let every effort be made to arouse and encourage the missionary spirit....Let each be taught to work for others, by practical labor for souls just where he is"* (7T, Page 148).

**G. Physical training.** Biblical narratives dealing with the schools of the prophets reveal examples of the students in these schools involved in manual labor/physical exercise (2 Kings 6:1–7). Ellen White comments: *"The physical as well as the religious training practiced in the schools of the Hebrews may be profitably studied....And now, as in the days of Israel, every youth should be instructed in the duties of practical life. Each should acquire a knowledge of some branch of manual labor by which, if need be, he may obtain a livelihood....Every student should devote a portion of each day to active labor"* (PP, Page 601).

## V. Teaching/Learning Methodology

**A. Oral instruction based upon the Hebrew Scriptures.** The instructional methodology in the schools of the prophets appears to have been largely oral—instruction combined with discussion. We find, for example, Elisha in Gilgal, with "the sons of the prophets sitting before him" (2 Kings 4:38). This oral instruction no doubt was coupled with and founded upon the study of Scripture. Ellen White amplifies: "In both the school and the home much of the teaching was oral; but the youth also learned to read the Hebrew writings, and the parchment rolls of the Old Testament Scriptures were open to their study" (cf. Ed, Page 47).

**B. "Incarnational" teaching model.** Reading the narratives revolving around the schools of the prophets gives the impression that the teachers (Samuel, Elijah, Elisha) employed what we might today call an "incarnational" model of education: see the various occasions of discussion and miracle linking disciples and teacher; note especially the "incarnational"

implication of Elisha's "sitting before them" and the ensuing discussion at the meal table (2 Kings 4:38–41) and the dynamic settings of students' "prophesying" and praising as they traveled to and from worship or met with their teacher (1 Samuel 10:5; 19:20). Ellen White gives a detailed summary of this "incarnational" teaching-learning methodology in the schools of the prophets: *"This is the way in which the schools of the prophets were conducted. Time was given in class for a faithful study of the thoughts presented. Hearts were warmed, and the voice of praise and thanksgiving was heard. The sacred gospel was humanized, as in the teachings of Christ. Much was accomplished for both teachers and students. Time was given for each to partake of the heavenly repast—to study the truths presented and then to add that which he had received from God"* (CT, Pages 436–7; see also the preceding two paragraphs in her description of the collegial, egalitarian manner of the instruction).

**C. Making the Bible "come alive" in personal experience.** The teaching methodology obviously went far beyond mere impartation of intellectual data. As the biblical narratives imply, it involved making Scripture "come alive" and real in the experience of both teacher and student. As Ellen White put it with regard to the students' experience in the Old Testament training schools: *"As they studied the word and the works of God, His life-giving power quickened the energies of mind and soul, and the students received wisdom from above.... Sanctified intellect brought forth from the treasure house of God things new and old, and the Spirit of God was manifested in prophecy and sacred song"* (Ed, Pages 46–47).

**D. Spirit of cooperation vs. competition.** The motivational spirit underlying study at the schools of the prophets is also apparent in the biblical narratives, where the students under Samuel were seen as a united "band" or "company," (Heb. *khebel* or *lahaqah*, 1 Samuel 10:5; 19:20) working and worshiping together without any evidence of rivalry or competition. The same is apparent in the congenial atmosphere implicit in the scenes of the schools of the prophets under the leadership of Elijah and Elisha. This spirit of cooperation and unselfish motivation is highlighted by Ellen White (PP 595).

**E. Lofty motivations for excellence.** Ellen White points out how, instead of fostering a spirit of pride and emulation, in the schools of the prophets there was the endeavor "to awaken the love for goodness and truth and beauty—to arouse the desire for excellence. *The student would seek the development of God's gifts in himself, not to excel others, but to fulfill the purpose of the Creator and to receive His likeness*" (PP, Page 595).

**F. Student respect for instructors.** A spirit of congeniality and respect is also stressed with regard to the students for their teachers. This is underscored in biblical accounts of the schools of the prophets by the humble self-designations (2 Kings 4:2; 6:3), courteous forms of address (2 Kings 6:5), and respectful actions (2 Kings 2:15) employed by the students in their interaction with Elisha. Ellen White appeals to students in her day to be like those in the schools of the prophets that upheld teachers and administrators: *"Students, never be found disparaging the schools which God has established.... When each student in our institutions of learning acts his part with fidelity, as Daniel acted his part in wicked Babylon, these institutions will resemble the schools of the prophets. No wrong influence will then go from the students. As consecrated instrumentalities, they will help to do the work they see necessary to be done. They will help to carry the burdens borne by the president and the teachers, and instead of disparaging the school, they will speak of the excellence and personal merit of the teachers"* (Notebook Leaflets from the Elmshaven Library, Volume 1, Page 83).

**G. Intensity and diligence in study.** Implicit in the biblical narratives is a mood of intensity and diligence of study among the students at the schools of the prophets (see, e.g., 1 Samuel 10:5; 19:20; 2 Kings 4:38). Ellen White elaborates by pointing out that in the study of Scripture the student then (and now) should *"grapple with difficult problems" and find in the Word "subject for the deepest thought, the loftiest aspiration"* (PP, Page 596). *"In the reverent contemplation of the truths presented in His word the mind of the student is brought into communion with the infinite mind. Such a study will not only refine and ennoble the character, but it cannot fail to expand and invigorate the mental powers"* (PP, Pages 596–599).

#### **H. Older, more-experienced students mentoring younger ones.**

In the schools of the prophets, we find the example of *older and more experienced workers* (Samuel, Elijah, Elisha) *instructing younger workers, working together in the ministry, allowing the younger workers an opportunity “to carry every burden that their youth and experience will allow. Thus Elijah educated the youth of Israel in the schools of the prophets; and young men today are to have a similar training”* (Ev, Page 683). The example of younger workers being trained as he associates with and imitates the older worker is likewise illustrated in Elijah’s mentoring of Elisha (1 Kings 19:21). (Ron E. Clouzet, “A Biblical Paradigm for Ministerial Training” [DMin diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1997], 114–115).

**I. The principle of “supersession”:** **students trained to supersede their teachers.** The mentoring of Elisha by Elijah also illustrates the biblical principle of “supersession” in which “*the destiny of those trained for ministry is to supersede the ministry of their predecessors*” (Clouzet, 116; cf. 115–116 for further discussion of this principle and of how its outworking in the lives of Elijah and Elisha typifies the relationship between John the Baptist and Jesus).

#### **VI. Faculty-Student Relations**

The biblical picture is one of close and intimate associations between faculty and students in the schools of the prophets. The students not only were “sitting before” their teacher (Elisha) in the academic setting (2 Kings 4:38), but also “living before” him in various domestic activities of their daily routine (2 Kings 6:1)—the Hebrew phrase in both cases is the same, implying equal intimacy in both academic endeavors and daily life.

Teachers and students worked together in manual labor (2 Kings 6:1–4; cf. MM, Page 81: “For many years it has been presented to me that teachers and students should unite in this work [vigorous physical exercise in the open air]. This was done anciently in the schools of the prophets”). They at least

sometimes shared meals (2 Kings 4:38). Teachers showed concern for the financial situations of the students (2 Kings 4:1), developed deep trust relationships (2 Kings 9:1–10), and shared a mutuality of interest in each other’s welfare (2 Kings 2:1–6).

Ellen White suggests that our schools today should be more like the schools of the prophets, and then refers to them not only as “training schools” but as “*family schools, where every student will receive special help from his teachers, as the members of the family should receive help in the home*” (6T, Page 152).

#### **VII. “Delivery System”**

**A. Location:** The main location for Samuel’s training school was at his hometown of Ramah (1 Samuel 19:18; cf. 7:17), with another campus apparently at the location of the ark at Kirjath-jearim (1 Samuel 7:1–2; cf. Ed, Page 46). Samuel may have had “extension centers” at the other major points of his yearly circuit: Bethel, Gilgal and Mizpeh (1 Samuel 7:16). Later, especially in the time of Elijah and Elisha, other “campuses” were apparently established: Bethel (2 Kings 2:3), Jericho (Verse 5), and Gilgal (2 Kings 4:38). The location of all these sites is significant in that they constitute places important in the history of God’s mighty acts for Israel, thus promoting a historical consciousness in the minds of the students.

**B. Size:** The narratives speak of a “band” or “company” of prophets in connection with Samuel (1 Samuel 10:5; 19:20), indicating a significant-sized group. The “sons of the prophets” in the days of Elijah and Elisha were comprised of a “student body” of considerable size in each location—at least 50, even up to 100 and perhaps more (2 Kings 2:7; 4:43).

**C. Living facilities and arrangements:** The narratives give some evidence of communal living, including eating together (2 Kings 4:38) and formal living quarters (2 Kings 6:1–2). There is also evidence of rural conditions with students (and apparently at times teachers) supporting

themselves by manual labor (2 Kings 6:1–7; cf. Ed, Page 47: “*The pupils of these schools sustained themselves by their own labor in tilling the soil or in some mechanical employment*”).

**D. Length of training:** No data is available on the length of time the students spent in the schools of the prophets, but Ellen White notes in the context of these schools, that *Elisha spent “several years” in ministerial training under his mentor Elijah* (PK, Pages 224–5).

#### **Conclusion**

The inspired data in the Bible and the writings of Ellen White give a rather comprehensive profile of the schools of the prophets in Old Testament times. Ellen White urges that our training schools for ministers and teachers become “more and more like the schools of the prophets” (8T 230). I conclude with questions for Adventist colleges and theological seminaries to ponder: How much of this Old Testament profile is relevant today? Do our current curricula and delivery systems measure up to the school of the prophets paradigm? In what ways can additional elements of the paradigm be incorporated into our pastoral educational models?



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#### **Resources for Further Research**

See especially Ron E. Clouzet, “A Biblical Paradigm for Ministerial Training” (D.Min. diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 1997), chapter 4 (pp. 97–117); Ellen White, *Education*, chapter 6, “The Schools of the Prophets” (pp. 45–50); idem, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, chapter 58, “The Schools of the Prophets” (pp. 592–602); idem, CD Rom entries under “The Schools of the Prophets” (192 entries).



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## Did you know?

Seminary Fall Week of Spiritual Emphasis (WOSE) will feature Leslie N. Pollard, PhD, DMin, MDiv, MBA, **who serves as the 11th president of Oakwood University in Huntsville, Alabama. Pollard brings an extensive education to his service and calling.** The fall WOSE will be 11am–12:20pm on Tuesday, September 15–17, 2015, in the Seminary Chapel.





“...Unfair! Unfair!  
We deserve more!...”





# Paradoxical Grace

By Peter Swanson

**I**t was early morning on the street corner where day laborers waited for work. They were ready to bend their backs, strain their muscles, and sweat hour after hour in the blazing summer heat.

It was the feel of that cold, hard penny pressed into the palm of their hands at day's end that kept them going. A penny a day was all you could get for a full day's work. No penny in your palm meant hardship at home.

Three hours into the day, more laborers joined the first crew on the job. Around noon and at 3:00 p.m. still more men arrived. One hour before quitting time, a few stragglers showed up and pitched in.

Then the whistle blew. The twelve-hour shift ended, and the men lined up for their pay.

That's when the trouble started. The paymaster gave a full day's wage to the men who had only worked one hour, and that made the others really mad. "Unfair! Unfair!" they yelled. "We worked eleven hours longer than they did! Give them less or give us more! We deserve more! We deserve more! We deserve more!"

That's where their thinking got twisted. In the early hours of the

morning they had hard-bargained for one whole penny in exchange for twelve hours of hard labor. And if that day had been like any other day, they would have been quite content that the penny they got was a fair wage.

In fact, on any other day they may have suspected ulterior motives on the part of the paymaster if he had given them more than they deserved. No self-respecting man wants a handout. He wants to earn what he gets. It's a matter of pride to never accept charity.

But that was no ordinary day. Some got more than they deserved—a lot more than they deserved. And that sparked a toxic reaction. The first-hired were outraged. "These last workers have worked only one hour. Yet you've treated us all the same, even though we worked hard all day under a blazing sun."<sup>1</sup>

Look at me! I worked the longest and the hardest! I sweated more! I sacrificed more! I have more scars! I deserve the biggest paycheck!

These were Peter's sentiments, and those of the other disciples. "We've given up everything to follow you. What will we get out of it?"<sup>2</sup> To answer that question, Jesus told this parable.

First off, He assured them that everyone would be paid for their work. None would be cheated out of what they had earned. Arrive early or late. Work full-time or part-time, you'll get your pay. "After all, the worker deserves to have his needs met."<sup>3</sup>

But the profound truth hidden in the heart of the story is about why some people got much more than they earned. They got much more than they deserved; much more than they could possibly deserve. It wasn't payment. It wasn't compensation. It wasn't reimbursement of expenses. It wasn't remuneration. It wasn't a *quid pro quo* agreement—If you'll do this, I'll do that. It was a free gift with no strings attached!

The 11/12ths that the 11th hour workers got was a gift, not wages. Not a bonus. Not a reward. Not a medal for exceptional service. Not an award for outstanding productivity. Not a recognition of superior attractiveness, or strength, or intelligence. Just a very generous gift.

Ah! But the problem is that some workers got the gift and others didn't. That doesn't seem fair. Why didn't everyone get more than they earned, more than they deserved?

The key is that Jesus told this story to His disciples because they were manifesting the same mercenary attitude as the first-hired hirelings.<sup>4</sup> Their jostling and jousting for position showed that they were in it for what they could get out of it. "An argument broke out among the disciples as to which one of them should be thought of as the greatest"<sup>5</sup>

Jesus assured them that a self-promoting attitude prevents people from getting anything more than fair wages for their labor. Desperately desiring to be first disqualifies them from being first. Insisting that they are deserving of the special favors reserved only for the greatest among them

clearly demonstrates that they are unworthy and undeserving.

The astonishing gift of grace is available to all, but it can only be received by those who aren't working to earn it. The words, "Well done, you good and faithful servant"<sup>6</sup> will only be heard by those who least expect to hear them—by those who feel most undeserving of the commendation. "We are not worthy of praise. We are servants who have simply done our duty."<sup>7</sup>

Grace can only be received by the person who bows in humility, beats on his breast in an agony of deep remorse, and cries out, "I'm guilty of death-penalty sins. I'm completely undeserving of any mercy. I'm totally unworthy of any divine favor. I desperately need what I can't ever deserve."

"I tell you, this sinner, not the Pharisee, returned home justified before God. For the proud will be humbled, but the humble will be honored."<sup>8</sup> The man who declared that he didn't deserve grace got it. The man who bragged that he was the best and deserved the most, got nothing.

I can imagine the amazement of the last man hired that day when the paymaster brought him up to the front of the line. I can see his jaw drop in astonishment when that cold hard penny is pressed into his hand. I can hear him gasp and say, "There must be some mistake. I only worked one hour, I don't deserve a full day's wage." And I can see the smile on the paymaster's face as he says, "You're so right! You don't deserve the extra 11/12ths. It's my gift to you. Go in peace."

#### Questions for Discussion:

1. Why is it so hard for well-educated, wealthy, attractive, accomplished persons to renounce the idea that they are worthy of the special favors of heaven?
2. If you can't earn grace or deserve it, how do you get it?

#### Endnotes

<sup>1</sup>Matthew 20:12, God's Word Translation.

<sup>2</sup>Matthew 19:27, God's Word Translation.

<sup>3</sup>Matthew 10:10, God's Word Translation.

<sup>4</sup>White, Ellen G., Review & Herald, July 10, 1894, par. 3.

<sup>5</sup>Luke 22:24, Good News Translation.

<sup>6</sup>Matthew 25:23, Good News Translation.

<sup>7</sup>Luke 17:10, New Living Translation.

<sup>8</sup>Luke 18:14, New Living Translation.



Peter Swanson, PhD, has taught graduate courses in Pastoral Care for over twenty-five years. He has been invited to teach and present at numerous national and international sites, and served as the chair of the Department of Christian Ministry. Prior to his emigration to the United States, he engaged in pastoral ministry for twelve years in his home country of South Africa.





# THE ADVENTIST MISSION:

## God's Use of Social Justice to Accomplish His Mission

By Christon Arthur

*Seventh-day Adventists have a fascination with prophecy. We revel in the biblical books of Daniel and Revelation, finding in them our organizational identity as the remnant church and detailing our role in its eschatology. We have become preoccupied with theological debates and philosophical labels at the expense of our God-given mission of social justice—to speak and act on behalf of the oppressed and marginalized, and to be dispensers of God's grace, His forgiveness, and His reconciliation. Unless our understanding of prophecy and of our organizational identity in the eschaton propels us to social justice, we will be lost.*

The Andrews University motto: *Seek Knowledge, Affirm Faith, Change the World* encapsulates the ideals of the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Our goal is to create a thirst for learning and knowledge in our students—we want them to be lifelong learners. And, we prepare our students to seek knowledge and view the world through the lens of faith—a faith commitment to Jesus Christ. It is only when our students are changed by the knowledge that they encounter and are transformed by their faith commitment to Christ that they are ready to change the world. They must first be changed, then they can change the world. To ensure that our students have life-changing experiences in the context of social justice, about five years ago we introduced the Summit on Social Consciousness. In 2011, we reflected on the lessons learned from the Rwanda genocide. In 2013, we grappled with the tragedy of sex trafficking. 2014 was dedicated to poverty—the poor next door. This year, we agonized over race and social justice. Next year, 2016 promises to be the most life-changing because of its cultural relevance—a summit on race.

The Summit was geared to bring a life changing awareness of social justice causes and provide an opportunity for students to participate. There are two passages in the Gospels that I used to form the theological framework for social justice. In the first of

the two passages, Christ Himself set the stage by making a case for social justice. The Gospel according to Luke asserts that,

*Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread through the whole countryside. He taught in their synagogues, and everyone praised him. He went to Nazareth, where he had been brought up, and on the Sabbath day he went into the synagogue, as was his custom. And he stood up to read. The scroll of the prophet Isaiah was handed to him. Unrolling it, he found the place where it is written: 'The Spirit of the Lord is on me, because he has anointed me to preach good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord's favor.' Then he rolled up the scroll, gave it back to the attendant and sat down. The eyes of everyone in the synagogue were fastened on him, and he began by saying to them, Today this scripture is fulfilled in your hearing (Luke 4:14–21, NIV).*

As Seventh-day Adventists, we cite Luke 4: 14–21 as evidence of Sabbath keeping in the Apostolic Church. And rightly so. However, we fail to grasp the significance of the Sabbath as the day of God's jubilee—to proclaim the year

of the Lord's favor. The question for us is, How does a 21st century Seventh-day Adventist proclaim to the poor, the prisoner, the blind, the oppressed, that this is God's jubilee? More importantly, how do we make the Sabbath a day of jubilee for the poor, the prisoner, the blind, the oppressed, etc.?

Juxtapose this passage to another scriptural passage from the Gospel according to Matthew. In this second passage, Jesus provided one account of the judgment as His separation of the faithful (sheep) from the unfaithful (goats): The sheep are rewarded with inheritance of the kingdom and the goats are cursed into eternal damnation. What is striking in this account of the judgment is that Christ's decision is made on the basis of human relationships and social justice.

*Then the King will say to those on his right, 'Come, you who are blessed by my Father; take your inheritance, the kingdom prepared for you since the creation of the world. For I was hungry and you gave me something to eat, I was thirsty and you gave me something to drink, I was a stranger and you invited me in, I needed clothes and you clothed me, I was sick and you looked after me, I was in prison and you came to visit me. . . . Truly I tell you, whatever you did for one of the least of these brothers and sisters of mine; you did for me' (Matthew 25:34–40).*

Similarly, condemnation is on the basis of not serving others (Matthew 25:41–46).

From these passages, the gospel and salvation are inextricably linked to social justice; and social justice is the ethical responsibility of the church. It is interesting to note that Luke made it crystal clear that Jesus was under the influence of the Holy Spirit when He entered the synagogue. Led by the Spirit, He went into the synagogue and was Spirit-led to read that passage on the Sabbath. Matthew Henry (1706), in his commentary, opined that it was providential for Jesus to have been directed to read that passage because the text spoke to the mission of the Messiah, and, by extension, to the mission of his Church—social justice.

We can judge the value that Christ placed on social justice by one of the evidences He examines in the judgment. It is striking that in the parable cited above, the saved are not distinguished based on their orthodoxy (right belief), but rather on their orthopraxy (right actions). Nelson (2011) asserted that “God does not fault them for their right beliefs, but he has a heartfelt to say to them about their lack of right behavior—particularly... when it comes to their treatment of the poor” (page. 295). Of course, right action by itself is not enough. For the Christian, right action should emanate from a converted life. It is the love of Christ that constrains us to perform good deeds (2 Corinthians 5:14).

Social Justice is not merely a mental assent; it is a lived life. It is not enough to understand the doctrine; the doctrine must be lived. Seventh-day Adventists have a fascination with prophecy. We place great value on understanding the biblical books of Daniel and Revelation and our organizational identity within the prophetic timeline. Unless that understanding propels us to act on behalf of and effect change in the lives of others, we will be lost. The mission of the Church is not to congregate behind closed doors and elegantly stained windows, offering prayers and singing hymns. Our mission is to “preach good news to the poor; proclaim freedom for the prisoners and recovery of sight for the blind, to release the oppressed, to proclaim the year of the Lord’s favor” (Luke 4:18–20). We exist for social justice—to make a difference in the lives of others—no ifs, ands, or buts about that reason for our existence!

Proponents of the church as an

agent of social justice argue that the Christian church should first reflect on the nature of the church in order to fulfill the purpose of the church (Hirsch, 2006; Van Gelder, 2007). The contemporary Seventh-day Adventist Church is in danger of losing its way because I think we have lost focus on the nature of Christ and His church. The church has become more preoccupied with theological debates and philosophical labels—liberal versus conservative—at the expense of being an instrument of God’s grace, God’s forgiveness, and reconciliation.

This lack of focus on the essence of our existence is not unique to Seventh-day Adventists, but is evident in contemporary Christendom. According to Hirsch (2006), the modern church has deviated from its calling and abandoned the model provided through Scripture. He claims that the church should reactivate its mission—become a socially conscious church—and engage the secular society on its own turf. Furthermore, he says, the church has become institutional and attractional, creating spectator Christians. In that regard, concludes Hirsch (2006), the church has lost its purpose and effectiveness and is largely irrelevant and obsolete.

This urgency to return the church to its divine purpose as participants dispensing God’s love and grace toward all people (Kim, 2004) is not a new phenomenon. While it could be argued that, historically, the idea of missions as a Christian endeavor to spread the gospel came into vogue in the 16th century (Kollman, 2011), the activity has its origins in the New Testament church. In the New Testament book of Acts, Paul embarked on at least three missionary journeys. However, the term “missions” was introduced in the mid-16th century by Ignatius of Loyola to describe the places and tasks to which Jesuit priests were assigned (Kollman, 2011). Continuing with that usage, Bosch (1991), in his landmark publication “Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Missions,” made a case for missiology to be regarded as the essential reason for the existence of the church. The basic tenant of the missional church is that the church exists for the sake of the world (Kim, 2004) and not for the sake of itself.

In a practical sense, “missions” means ‘sending’ and it is the central theme describing the purpose of God’s action in human history” (Guder,

1998, page 4). As Krum (2005) asserts, Christians should have a commitment to go “into the cultural settings and world where secularists are” (page 28). The church is commanded to take the gospel into all the world (Matthew 28:18–20)—to take the gospel into the stronghold of the “enemy” where the postmodern, the secularist, the modern, the agnostic, the atheist live, and dispense the love and grace of the Gospel. Christians are called to be the salt of the earth (Matthew 5:13) and the light of the world (Matthew 5:14). However, if our light shines where the “light” is already shining, then the effect of our light is not evident. And, if our salt is applied to areas that are already “preserved,” then the effect of our salt is not obvious. It may even become too much. The Church has its greatest impact where it is darkest. The effect of our light will be apparent where social ills are rampant. In addition to proper exposure from the light, our salt would reverse the decay and preserve morality. Light and salt have the greatest impact when they come into contact with darkness and decay. If our communities are in “darkness” and have moral “decay,” we have not lived up to our calling.

The challenge for the Seventh-day Adventist Church is that we have become isolated hermitages unto ourselves. We congregate around our institutions—most notably around our universities and hospitals—creating Adventist communes separated from the world. Our institutions are distinguishable because they are located in rural or semi-rural areas so that we won’t be contaminated by the world. From these enclaves, our “missionary” exploits involve following the John the Baptist methodology: We promote a vegetarian diet—our own version of locusts and wild honey—and dash into the neighboring communities and cities proclaiming the sinful ways of the occupants, then dash back into the security of our enclaves.

Some might argue that there are several Seventh-day Adventists who work at our institutions and do not exhibit this reclusive mentality. But they would be the exception. I think the prevailing Adventist mind-set is one of distinctness and separateness. Others might contend that, as a church, we are to be “John the Baptist” before the second coming of Christ. That may be true. We are to proclaim the message of a soon returning Christ and be filled with the Spirit, just like John, but with



the practice of being light and salt—a constant light in the dark places and dwelling among those who are experiencing social injustice and moral decay. Our God is Emmanuel. He dwells with us. And we are to dwell among those for whom He cares. According to Ellen White (1905), “Christ’s method alone will give true success in reaching the people. The Savior mingled with men [people] as one who desired their good. He showed his sympathy for them, ministered to their needs, and won their confidence. Then he bade them, ‘Follow Me’” (page 143).

This is the Jesus model! He identified with us. He lived among us. He became one with us. He expects the same of us. That should be our mission. Seventh-day Adventists cannot become a relevant church until we care enough about people to identify with them and live among them. I live in an Adventist university community. We need to move beyond the gates of the campus and have a presence in the community. We are to become an abiding presence of salt and light where it matters most—out there and not merely in our own communes!

Universities (both public and private) are accepting the mantle of civic responsibility and social justice. Many embrace the designation of being an Engaged University and expect their students to engage in social justice and civic responsibilities as a learning outcome. I think Seventh-day Adventist institutions of higher learning should require all students to be involved in some aspect of social justice as an academic outcome expectation. This concept of social justice teaches the important lesson that ministry is not something one prepares

for doing in the future, but it is just causes that one engages in wherever one finds oneself. It’s time that we see social justice as “ministry” by serving communities where injustice prevails.

An example of this philosophy can be found on the campus of Andrews University. Since 1994, the School of Architecture, Art & Design, in collaboration with Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA), has been working in Lajas, Bolivia, to build CERENID, a home school for complete restoration and development of at-risk street children. Architecture students have designed and begun construction on housing for the children, a church, administration and health-care building, a general-purpose building that contains a kitchen, dining area, classrooms, and quarters for volunteer workers, as well as a sanitary sewer system and a master plan for the entire project. In addition to giving students hands-on design and construction skills, this project allows them to give of themselves to meet the needs of children who have suffered, in their short lives, from abuse in one form or another. The personal relationships formed and the satisfaction that comes from service to others make this one of the most important aspects of the School of Architecture, Art & Design.

The biblical model is to take the gospel into Jerusalem, Judah, Samaria, and the uttermost ends of the earth (Acts 1:8). But, as Seventh-day Adventists, we have made our homes in “Jerusalem.” We are satisfied to serve in “Judah.” In the meantime, “Samaria” and the “uttermost ends of the earth” are waiting for our salt and light. The Samaria of the big cities, the

Samaria of poverty-stricken places, the uttermost parts of drug-infested neighborhoods are in neighboring cities and states and not simply overseas. Missions need not be an international trip to serve foreigners in distant lands, but serving those who need to be lifted wherever they are—in our neighborhoods, in our neighboring cities, in our neighboring states, *and* overseas. The question in Isaiah 6 is asked of us today: Whom shall I send? Who will go for us? As a university community we need to create the culture where every academic program has social justice either at home or abroad as one of its learning outcomes. Such a culture would make it possible for every one of our students to answer, “Here I am, send me.”



Christon Arthur, PhD, is associate provost and dean of the School of Graduate Studies & Research, Andrews University.

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# MINING A METAPHOR: Implications for Mission

*By Kathleen Beagles*

I have always loved the metaphors for the Church that are listed in our fundamental belief: body of Christ, bride of Christ, and family of God. Each of these metaphors helps us reflect deeply on our relationships with the Trinity, as well as with one another. From the metaphor of the body, I absorb the truth that we are a meta-system, whether we want to be or not. A “detached” retina is not alone. The pain and detachment it is going through has a very definite effect on all the rest of the intricate systems.

From the metaphor of the bride of Christ, I gather that, all together, we are His beloved, that we are His pride and joy as we are in unity, that He deserves a bride without an auto-immune disease—without parts of her attacking other parts.

I especially love the metaphor of the family of God. It gives me insight into how we are to disciple. Although I hear “nurture and retention” as a phrase to describe how we can stem the tide of members becoming disillusioned and leaving active fellowship, the family metaphor shares with me the truth that a more apt approach to the problem would be “attachment and nurture.” New baby members of a family need secure attachment to caregivers in the family. Then, they need to be nurtured and established in the way of the Lord. While spiritual development is certainly a work of the Holy Spirit, like character development in a child, it is also an intentional function of a loving and supporting family.

But recently, another inspired metaphor has come to my attention which has given me even more to reflect on about how we view our mission in this world, and consequently, how we are “church.” This metaphor is based on 1 Peter 2:5. “You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up

spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.<sup>1</sup>

At first glance, this verse can be passed over quickly. We hear much more about the truth that our body is the temple of the living God. We can probably recite 1 Corinthians 6:19 and 20. We have been told over and over that our body is a temple of the Holy Spirit within us, which we have from God. It has been reinforced that we are not our own, that we were bought with a price. We know we are to glorify God in our bodies. We don’t usually hear so much about how we are to glorify God through being Church.

Inspiration, however, recorded in the book “In Heavenly Places,” has very thought-provoking commentary connected to this metaphor of a spiritual house for a holy priesthood. It outlines the evangelistic purpose and sanctification process for both individual Christians and the corporate Church. This is the commentary:

The church on earth is God’s temple, and it is to assume divine proportions before the world... It is to be composed of living stones laid close together, stone fitting to stone, making a solid building. All these stones are not of the same shape or dimension. Some are large and some are small, but each one has its own place to fill. In the whole building there is not to be one misshapen stone. Each one is perfect. And each stone is a living stone, a stone that emits light. The value of the stones is determined by the light they reflect to the world.

Now is the time for the stones to be taken from the quarry of the world and brought into God’s workshop, to be hewed, squared, and polished, that they may shine. This is God’s plan, and He desires all who profess to believe the truth

to fill their respective places in the great, grand work for this time.

The angelic architect has brought his golden measuring rod from heaven, that every stone may be hewed and squared by the divine measurement, and polished to shine as an emblem of heaven, radiating in all directions the bright, clear beams of the Sun of Righteousness.

In this world we are to shine in good works. The Lord requires His people...to reflect the light of God’s character, God’s love, as Christ reflected it. As we look unto Jesus, all our lives will be aglow with that wondrous light. Every part of us is to be light; then whichever way we turn, light will be reflected from us to others. Christ is the way, the truth, and the life. In Him is no darkness at all; therefore, if we are in Christ, there will be no darkness in us.

The church on earth is to become the court of holy love.... Christian fellowship is one means by which character is formed. Thus selfishness is purged from the life, and men and women are drawn to Christ, the great center. Thus is answered His prayer that His followers may be one as He is one with the Father.<sup>2</sup>

This commentary helps to pull together truth God has been impressing on me from His Word. There are seven insights I’ve gained from reflecting thoughtfully on the above passage. These insights have greatly increased my sense of the need for “wholistic” discipleship among us. And also for the importance of our eschatological mission.

**Insight 1:** The church is God’s means of “tabernacling” in the world among *all the people He loves, died for, and wants to save.*



He asks us to let Him make out of us a sanctuary, that He may dwell among us and show Himself. We are not simply a gathering of people who have been saved from everlasting torment or oblivion, and who therefore have an ethical obligation to let others know the escape route, should they want to take it.

**Insight 2:** Our success in being fit together as living stones affects God's success in showing His character to *all the people He loves, died for, and wants to save*.

It matters how we live and move and have our being as Christians. We are not just people all residing, topsy-turvy in a bomb shelter until Jesus comes. Our very state of being is part of God's message to the world.

**Insight 3:** Each of us living stones has a place to fit and to fill, so we cannot remain misshapen.

Many have over-emphasized justification. We function as if we have found the bomb shelter and just have to stay in it till we're rescued, rather than realizing that we are actually being made into a temple structure for the dwelling place of God on this earth.

**Insight 4:** As the Spirit works to portray the character of Jesus through us to *all the people He loves, died for, and wants to save*, we become more and more transparent living stones.

There is a dying to self that is an integral part of this process. This involves physical, spiritual, and emotional healing and development that is the work of the Spirit, but which is to be wisely facilitated in the life of the community.

**Insight 5:** Our individual value lies in the consistency of our looking to Jesus and reflecting the light of His character to *all the people He loves, died for, and wants to save*.

Imbuing the stones with life (re-vival) and shaping them to fit the temple design (re-formation) are accomplished by looking steadily to Jesus. "But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit."<sup>3</sup>

**Insight 6:** Evangelism involves bringing new stones from the quarry of this world and including them in the temple of living stones where God works on us in order to demonstrate the character of His Son to *all the people He loves, died for, and wants to save*.

Evangelism changes from being an invitation to others to wait in the bomb shelter with us, to an invitation to be transformed from a misshapen quarry rock to a living stone in the temple, helping to reflect the glory of God to the rest of *all the people He loves, died for, and wants to save*.

**Insight 7:** Our very transformation process into smooth, transparent living stones fitted together into a "court of holy love" IS God's message of hope to *all the people He loves, died for, and wants to save*.

"Christ is waiting with longing desire for the manifestation of Himself in His church. When the character of Christ shall be perfectly reproduced in His people, then He will come to claim them as His own."<sup>4</sup>

"Love to man is the earthward manifestation of the love of God. It was to implant this love, to make us children of one family, that the King of glory became one with us. And when His parting words are fulfilled, 'Love one another, as I have loved you' (John 15:12); when we love the world as He has loved it, then for us His mission is accomplished. We are fitted for heaven; for we have heaven in our hearts."<sup>5</sup>



Kathleen Beagles, PhD, who directs the MA and PhD programs in religious education, has come to the Seminary from a background of Adventist education and religious curriculum development. Her passion is to see more intentional opportunities happening at the local church level for God's family to grow into the full stature of men and women in Christ Jesus.



*"Each of us living stones has a place to fit and to fill, so we cannot remain misshapen."*



## Endnotes

<sup>1</sup> *New American Standard Bible: 1995 update*. (1995). (1 Peter 2:5). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

<sup>2</sup> White, E. G., *In Heavenly Places* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1967), 281.

<sup>3</sup> *New American Standard Bible: 1995 update*. (1995). (2 Corinthians 3:18). LaHabra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.

<sup>4</sup> White, E. G., *Last Day Events* (Nampa, ID: Pacific Press Publishing Association, 1992), 39.

<sup>5</sup> White, E. G., *God's Amazing Grace* (Washington, DC: Review and Herald Publishing Association, 1973), 54.



“Like the 12 disciples...  
...this can change the world.”





# Farming in the City!

“T By Skip Bell

hey are family to me.” I was enjoying the shade provided by a large old maple while taking a break from weeding vegetables at one of Chicago’s several urban farms. “Skinny arms,” as this mid-teen had been affectionately nicknamed years ago by her fellow gardeners, was relaxing for a few moments as well. I had been observing her joy as she worked, and wanted to hear her story. So I engaged her in conversation. The acquaintance continued through moments of rest and work together. She spoke from underneath the brim of a well-worn baseball hat controlling her generous braids, with a smile that lit up the space around her.

It was easy to tell from the enthusiasm in her voice that the farm had become something important in her life. She had begun years ago when she heard of the children’s summer gardening program from her public school. She was now part of the regular volunteer teen staff. She earned money occasionally at the vegetable kiosk, and helped other volunteers who were just learning the farm’s organic practices. From a tough neighborhood on the south side of Chicago, nurtured by a single mother,

having learned to navigate her way to the farm on public transportation, she was proud of her involvement.

I had simply asked if the young adults from the church who managed the farm had mentored her in any way. Her response was quick and heartfelt. “They are family to me.” I could tell she meant it.

## Chicago’s Story

Chicago is home to an estimated 2.7 million residents in the city itself, with nearly 10 million in the standard metropolitan statistical area. Chicagoans love their city. Life revolves around manufacturing, finance, agricultural commodity markets, distinguished educational institutions, cultural institutions, sports, some of the nation’s finest museums, tourism and the achievements of its citizens.

There are challenges as city residents face the reality of gang violence, impoverished neighborhoods, and sub-standard schools in the poorer neighborhoods. Evidence of gentrification can be seen throughout the city: new parks, community gardens and retail centers surrounding new

privately developed urban housing. Investment in the urban landscape has brought suburban families back to the city center to live in closer proximity to jobs, while creating new housing problems for the displaced poor. Rents have increased so dramatically that staying in the city has become more difficult for the working poor.

Chicago remains a city marked by agriculture and horticulture. It is renowned for its lakeside parks, such as Grant Park, Millennium Park and Lincoln Park. In the summer, the lakefront transforms into an attractive beachfront, offering swimming, recreation, biking and family picnicking that people enjoy, always in sight of park or garden space.

### **The Chicago Lights Urban Farm**

Chicago Lights Urban Farm is one of the six programs of a parent 501(c)(3) nonprofit community outreach organization of the Fourth Presbyterian Church located in the city center. Its mission is to provide hope and opportunity to Chicago's children, youth and young adults facing the challenges of poverty. Funding comes from members of the congregation and corporate organizations interested in the service the farm provides.

Fourth Presbyterian Church was organized February 12, 1871. Its current building, a grand gothic structure, dates to 1912 and is noted as a Chicago landmark. On the corner of Michigan Avenue and Delaware, it is in the midst of Chicago's "Magnificent Mile." The congregation of Fourth Presbyterian is large, mostly Eurocentric, and could rightly be described as representing the prosperous residents of Chicago's "Gold Coast."

The Urban Farm began as a local community garden in the Cabrini-Green neighborhood on the north side of Chicago in 2003. The neighborhood has been identified with high crime rates, while being home for thousands of low-income families. By the time the residents began the garden project, the infrastructure of the Chicago Housing Authority-managed developments had crumbled, schools were poor, and police and fire services were lacking. Families saw the shared garden space as a way to improve conditions in their troubled and impoverished neighborhood. When the city of Chicago launched its gentrification program, Cabrini-Green was on the top of the list of places to introduce privately developed mixed-income housing.

The Fourth Presbyterian congregation had purchased land along Chicago Avenue on the edge of Cabrini-Green in 2002 with the hope of building a community center, but those plans were altered when the city revealed its gentrification plans for Cabrini-Green. Rather than relinquishing the land, the Chicago Lights directors called together residents, architects and city officials to consider their vision for an urban farm. The

idea took root. The farm was built in such a way that it could be relocated when necessary, and operations began in 2008.

An urban farm is surprisingly mobile and relatively inexpensive to build—if land can be secured. The Chicago Lights Urban Farm requires fencing, a small mobile office trailer, two greenhouses, a hot house, a tool shed and a produce stand. Soil from six inches deep to two feet deep covers pavement and old foundations, with only a few areas that are bare soil under the imported soil and mulch. There are rows of compost piles, beds for the propagation of worms and their castings, and an irrigation system laid out above ground that can be easily winterized. There are picnic tables for rallying volunteers, and for breaks during gardening activities. The rest of the space is row after row of produce.

### **A Farm as Ministry**

The farm's focus is empowering children, youth and adults through access to healthy, affordable food and economic opportunity. The farm offers training in agriculture, healthful living, leadership and micro-enterprise. It provides a "leveling ground" for diverse neighbors from the city center and the near north side. Wealthy older adults with sweat on their brows, soil on their hands, and stains on their jeans from the "Gold Coast" only a mile away work alongside teens from impoverished neighborhoods. Some of the harvest is consumed by families who serve at the farm, while the rest is sold at the farm stand on the property, by the teens as they set up temporary tables on street corners, or by bicycle delivery.

The farm generates income for teens learning microenterprise through four initiatives. One is an arrangement called "Salad Shares," in which people in the neighborhood pay a subscription to receive home delivery of high-quality fresh organically grown produce. Teens take off on bicycles or on foot with several neatly packaged sacks of fresh vegetables for delivery. A second is allotment gardening. This arrangement allows people to rent a small patch on which they can grow and tend their own garden within the organic horticultural rules of the farm, while using the farm tools available on-site. A third is the kiosk on the property, manned by teens. When the kiosk is open, the produce is also sold by teens standing on surrounding street corners. A fourth method is linkage with "Good Food Mobile," a city-wide food delivery service.

### **Description of the Farm Staff**

Three full time-employees and one part-time employee manage the farm, with a host of volunteers.



The director is a woman in her 30s, who has worked for Fourth Presbyterian Church since she was a teen. Her exposure to the Cabrini-Green neighborhood led her to fall in love with the people, their families and their sense of resilience. All three full-time employees are young college graduates with a vision for service. The part-time employee is a young man from the Cabrini-Green neighborhood of about 21 years of age, who has emerged from daunting circumstances.

The team leading the outreach functions in a relaxed and collegial fashion. They share a small office trailer. During weekly team meetings, they sit down and discuss the challenges and celebrate the victories they experience on the farm. Information flows to the volunteer teams. The directors work side-by-side with the volunteers, and most communication happens with a "spade in the hand." The team receives feedback from the community through advisory committees and ongoing community dialogue.

Three remarkable characteristics are obvious in the leadership team. These are young adults with a vision of compassion. They identify Christianity as service. Their idea of discipleship is quite a contrast to the liturgical "high church" worship services in their Gothic building on Michigan Avenue. I asked one, well covered with soil and looking very much like a seasoned gardener, what the farm meant to her. She replied, "This is my church."

Another apparent reality is that these people know their stuff. As one of the staff stood over one of the large wooden box structures explaining the horticulture of worms for the garden, I realized how little I knew about a simple living thing like worms, their function and how important their presence, with their castings, are to the things we eat. I had no idea there was so much to raising produce! More significantly, my mind moved to the illustrations and parables Jesus employed from the natural world. I marveled at how much Christianity could be seen in the simple workings of preparing the soil, planting, nurturing and harvesting. I also realized that these young adults had developed an awe for how nature works and a respect for creation.

Something else was evident. They were deeply into healthy living and food justice. They delighted in helping impoverished families have affordable whole organic produce and in teaching them how to use it. These young adults forming the leadership team knew that, for the most part, they had come from privileged families and were anxious to distribute the blessings they had received. They were experiencing stewardship. A short distance from the Chicago Lights Urban Farm, about a 12-minute walk, I passed a downtown automobile dealership specializing in new luxury automobiles one afternoon. As I reflected on people dressed in expensive suits and stylish dresses admiring the

automobiles, I was humbled by the contrast of the servants of Christ toiling in the soil with impoverished families only a few blocks away. They were demonstrating Christian discipleship.

I watched a young teen from Cabrini-Green take off on his bicycle with a young adult volunteer to deliver sacks of produce. The sacks were arranged in delivery carts pulled behind their bicycles. What impressed me was the expression on the teenager's face. I thought of the joy expressed when that young man might soar to dunk a basketball or win a race in the neighborhood. He was just as proud to be delivering fresh healthy food, and likely making a bit of income from it.

### More About "Skinny Arms"

Of course, that is not her real name; let me call her Denise. Think about her experience, similar to so many others whose lives have been transformed by working the soil together in that place. Like others I met, she says she has learned to work, developed muscles, learned to organize, learned to communicate, learned how to get along with others, learned about plants, gardening, cooking with vegetables and healthy food. She was developing respect for nature and how complex it is. When I told her I followed a whole plant vegan diet, she laughed, said she had tried it, and began to ask questions.

Quite the change for a kid from a tough south Chicago neighborhood. While talking about what the place had meant to her, I asked about siblings. She described one brother, not involved with the farm, spending most of his time on the streets. She said with noticeable sadness in her voice, "He is not safe." After a pause of a few seconds of silence, she exclaimed with that unique mixture of joy and reverence the redeemed express, "But I am safe here." When she said that, I had to turn my face away for a moment. I was in the presence of the grace of God.

I asked about the micro-enterprise. She proudly related recent checks of several hundred dollars each she had earned from selling the produce. But there was more, and she wanted to tell me about it. She now knew what she wanted to do; she would go to a culinary school and become a chef specializing in healthy food. She bragged about a particular dish which was her specialty, and how she had raised some of the ingredients herself. The dish had won a prize in a city competition. She had a dream, I believe a God-given dream, and I imagine she will reach it.

### Conclusion

Churches that serve change lives through Christian relationships. It is not always necessary to open the

Bible to lead someone to Christ. Faith in God becomes evident in the serving, in sharing blessings and understanding, and in respecting others without reference to circumstance or position.

One can give a Bible study on the work of the Creator, or kneel down and till the earth beside someone who does not know the Creator. I found you can affirm creation in the lessons of the creation itself. I discovered that working with others on the urban farm is a very effective way to share knowledge and evidence of the Creator.

One can preach about redemption in Christ, or work beside someone to restore a garden in the middle of urban blight. I found that the restorative process of the urban farm inspired confidence in new life and hope. I discovered that restoring a space opens one's mind to the redemptive work of God.

One can quote scripture to assure another that their life has meaning, or admire what they are able to do as you work beside them and realize their gifts. I found that teens from dangerous neighborhoods are talented and can aspire to better things. I discovered that God has a thousand ways to reach a life and fashion someone in His image.

Denise told me she has developed deep respect for those young adults who give their time to work with her, to get to know her. As I watched the staff and other volunteers work together, and observed their laughter and respect alongside teens like Denise, I knew mentoring was going on. I knew lessons were being transferred. Mentors and friends. Relationship. Love. Evangelism.

Like the 12 disciples, like the simple people who left their fishing nets some 2,000 years ago, this can change the world.



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# SPIRITUAL CALLING: VOCATION AND AVOCATION

By Stanley E. Patterson

## Prologue

My family culture did not predispose me for a life calling in professional pastoral service for my church. We were among those commonly referred to within the churchgoing community as “unchurched.” The Bible did not grace a shelf in our home nor do I remember attending church before the age of 10, apart from my uncle’s wedding in the local Presbyterian church. The ambient attitude of my family regarding preachers (this is the term I later replaced with the more appropriate “pastor”) was negative due to the opinion that they lived off the hard-earned money of people who actually “worked for a living.” The influence of this setting contributed to the conclusion I came to at the age of eight or nine years while playing and pondering alone in the shade of an old Chinese elm tree that my lifework could be any of several possibilities, but the emphatically most undesirable was—a preacher.

My family became Christians about four years before I left home. My departure at age 17 carried with it the hope of rediscovering the guilt-free life I had enjoyed as an “unchurched” child. I married and became a father at age 19 and began to experience spiritual stirrings during the following three or four years, accompanied by a confusing sense that I should become a preacher.

Why would God focus my future on the lowest item on my list of vocations? I spoke of these thoughts to no one until the moment I stood beside my pastor at the base of the steps leading up to the baptistery where I would proclaim my commitment to Jesus. I simply said to him, “I think God is calling me to be a pastor.” To my surprise, he shared this tidbit with the congregation that witnessed my baptism just before he lowered me into the water.

The affirmation and encouragement I received from my family and newfound Christian community was clear and positive. That never changed. Though I continued to struggle with my own doubts about realizing such a future, the personal and professional affirmation and encouragement never failed me. I finished my undergraduate studies with honors. I received a call to pastoral internship. I was reviewed and approved for ordination to gospel ministry. During that journey, there was never a sense that my church did not embrace and encourage my call to serve God and His people. I look back across nearly 40 years of ministry—pastor, departmental leader, administrator and now seminary professor—and the voice and embrace of my church continue to affirm my calling. The blessing of this reality has been a powerful positive influence in both my personal and professional life—but then, I am not a woman.

## The Process of Calling to Professional Ministry

The analysis and description of the process of spiritual calling to ministry is subject to the same uncertainty and lack of generalizable specificity as anything that has its source in the person of the Holy Spirit. The boundaries that limit our Newtonian concepts of start and finish, beginning and ending, and the incremental steps along the way to creating a method or model do not limit the One who comes from mystery and departs into mystery (John 3:8). The means by which the Spirit woos one toward the discovery of calling to a specific ministry are varied and defy standardization of process. The relational omniscience of the Spirit of God allows for each person to experience the necessary communication to initiate a process of movement toward the discovery of voice and the experiencing of ministry specific to that calling.<sup>1</sup>

Saul of Tarsus seems to have been immune to the gentle prodding of the Spirit, but clearly responded to the dramatic confrontation with the Spirit on the road to Damascus (Acts 9:3–20). Elijah, who we might think deserved a more dramatic demonstration of calling, was spoken to by God through a “still, small voice” (1 Kings 19:11–13). The range of demonstrated

options applied in the biblical record clearly indicates a diverse, customized approach to God's expression of calling. This diversity is, however, joined to a standard expectation that, "The call to ministry is intrinsically connected with pivotal notions of apostolicity, compassion, and divine entrustment."<sup>2</sup> Though the voice of calling may vary in tone and context, one's willingness to be sent, to love those to be served, and to be faithful to the calling have not changed through the ages, as was dramatically demonstrated long ago in the rejection and replacement of the priestly call to all firstborn sons (Exodus 32:29; Numbers 3:11–13; 8:18–19).

### Initial Stage: A Personal Sense of Calling

The call to ministry most often begins in an encounter with God—personal and secret. The private aspect neither disallows the dramatic nor does it assume acceptance of the call. Rather, it is a stage where the called and the Caller dialogue or even wrestle spiritually with the prospect of a life dedicated to ministry. Questions of competency, character fitness, temperament or even lifelong ambitions must be internally reconciled with the expectations of ministry. It is in this struggle that life ambitions are clarified, adjusted and replaced if ministry is to be embraced. It is a time of spiritual transformation that serves as the beginning of preparation to serve.

Curtis Thomas<sup>3</sup> asserts that, "The biblical concept of a 'call to the ministry' does not include a vision, special revelation, or mystical experience." He shares this view with other scholars who discount or reject the mystical element of vision or a sense of the voice of God. Such tend to hold to the view that calling is a function of the community of faith, who recognize and develop those in whom they see evidence of promise in formal ministry. This view fails to account for the many biblical references to calling which involved a mystical encounter with God (Exodus 3:1–10; Judges 6:11–14; Isaiah 6:1–8; Jeremiah 1:4–10; Acts 9:1–18) and served to initiate the ministry of the called ones.

The "immediate" response of Peter, Andrew, James and John (Matthew 4:18–22) would suggest that their radical, unhesitant obedience to Jesus' invitation was preceded by some preparation that predisposed them to respond positively. Their association

with the ministry of John the Baptist placed them in the context of preparation for the emergence of the Messiah (Isaiah 40:3; Mark 1:1–8; Luke 3:3–11; John 1:19–42). It serves as evidence that the Spirit of God is active in the mystery of calling and the discovery of one's voice in service to the Master.

### Self-assessment of Calling

Coming to grips with one's calling requires engaging self in a conversation to determine the accuracy of perception—a metacognitive process of clarification. Is the called one's sense of calling consistent with his or her passions and dreams? Are the core values of the called one likely to be affirmed by responding to the call to ministry? Is a sense of spiritual peace experienced in response to prayer for God's guidance and clarity? This process is a private journey that will eventually be tested in conversation with experienced, spiritually mature people, but begins in silent dialogue between God and self.

Mark Sanborn,<sup>4</sup> while writing in the secular context and not specifically referring to spiritual calling to ministry, provides some guidance for sorting out issues related to calling by suggesting five cogent questions that could inform the process of self-assessment for calling:

1. What would you do for free?

Is there an activity you enjoy so much that you'd do it for free, even if other people would consider it work?

2. What riles you?

Irritation can be a great motivator.

3. What interests you?

What do you like to read about and study? When you're in a bookstore or a newsstand or browsing online, what piques your interest? Do you find yourself returning to the same topics again and again? Perhaps you've found your passion. Your heart may be telling you what it wants; you just need to recognize it.

4. Who interests you?

What groups of people do you tend to notice? That is, whom are you most interested in helping?

5. What will minimize your regrets?

If you have regrets at the end of your life, what do you think they'll be? We tend to ask ourselves, "Will I regret doing this?" But often the better question is, "Will I regret not doing this?"<sup>5</sup>

Finding relative peace with the

urgings that are collectively perceived as a call to ministry is a critical advancement in the journey of responding responsibly to the call.

### Informal Community Affirmation

It is in this stage that the called will often move toward a context that allows for basic experimentation with behaviors that test the calling that has heretofore been a private conversation between the Caller and the called. This might emerge as a conversation with a colleague or friend about spiritual issues or even a sharing of the sense of calling itself. Church attendance may now be accompanied by willing involvement in ministry activities in which the called one has never before engaged. Out of this experimentation, unsolicited affirmation will often emerge that interfaces with the private spiritual journey related to one's sense of calling to ministry.

At this point, the call does not generally have a definite sense of direction. Casual affirmations may be expressed in the form of questions such as, "Have you ever thought about being a ....?" Such queries and similar statements serve to begin building a sense of direction as the spiritual conversation with the Caller broadens and begins taking on more concrete dimensions and possibilities. It remains, however, a personal sense of calling, even though it involves elements of input from others. At this point, the formal organization of the church is not involved. It is rather a time when one's personal calling is tested in various ways.

### Testing and Preparation

Following a period of informal experimentation, the called one generally chooses to invest in the prescribed<sup>6</sup> process of undergraduate theological education<sup>7</sup> that carries with it significant risk and expense. This undertaking is one of faith since there is, at this point, no assurance that the church will affirm the personal sense of calling with an offer of professional internship. This is an especially significant risk for females who respond to a sense of God's calling and accept the risk of investing tuition and time in the hope that their faith community will provide a place for them to validate their calling through professional service. While the risk is much higher for females, it is a real risk for both men and women in that



theological undergraduate education has limited application outside of professional ministry. Whether an intentional part of the process or not, this risky initiative to prepare for a vocation of ministry service is a significant test of commitment to the calling of ministry.

The risk is often offset by ongoing work in a trade or other employment that provides not only means to live but also a contingency should the hope for service in ministry not be realized. Peter demonstrated such behavior during the discouraging days following the crucifixion of Christ when he acted on his declaration, “I am going fishing” (John 21:3). He could not have so easily chosen to return to his boat and nets if he had not held his equipment in reserve—a backup plan. Freeman reports that, “Among the Jews, the boys were compelled to learn trades. It was considered disreputable not to be acquainted with some branch of handicraft, a practical knowledge of a trade being regarded as a prerequisite to personal independence.”<sup>8</sup> This behavior seems both wise and prudent, for a testing time should anticipate, but not presume, a positive outcome in the form of a professional call to ministry.

Though this testing time occurs in the context of academic development, it also provides the context for demonstration of practical skills of ministry delivery through practicum assignments, mentoring relationships and church involvement. Although spiritual gifting can vary widely even among professional pastors, the essential competency expectations of the church for those called to ministry are generally demonstrated and assessed during this time of testing.

Concurrent with observation and assessment of emerging competencies is the revelation of character and emotional balance necessary for effective vocational ministry. Though it is common to hire primarily on the basis of competency, it should be remembered that what generally disqualifies a practicing minister from service is failure of character—not competency. Attention is wisely focused upon the presence and practice of the relational graces of the Holy Spirit—love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, gentleness, goodness, faithfulness and self-control. These elements are strong indicators of the presence or absence of a character that will sustain the service of the called one.

Another aspect of this testing time

is the expansion of the faith community to include educators and other religion professionals who serve as observers and assessors of the now semi-professional development of the called one. This observation and assessment process during formal undergraduate education is also shared by church officials charged with discovering and recruiting ministry candidates to serve the professional leadership needs of the church.

### **Calling as Vocational or Avocational Ministry**

A fork in the road of calling prominently presents itself at or near the end of the undergraduate education process, for it is at this time that the informal affirmation of the faith community is validated or not by the act of the official church in extending an invitation to serve an internship as a professional minister. Men and women

## **IF YOU HAVE Regrets AT THE END OF YOUR LIFE WHAT DO YOU THINK THEY’LL BE?**

affirmed by a professional call to ministerial internship are granted limited ecclesiastic authority in accordance with the license or credential issued. As such, the testing time continues in the context of internship training, along with observation and assessment. This period of the developmental process is marked by great variation in training quality and expectation by the sponsoring church organization. Some assume that the schools of religion produce a person capable of independent leadership and consequently view the intern as a source of production and growth, while others hold the primary expectation that the intern needs a time of discipleship and development in practical ministry skills and behaviors beyond academic preparation. Some interns serve alone without the benefit of supervision by a senior pastor, while others follow the policy prescribed process and are mentored

for a period of time prior to assignment to a church or district of their own.

Female interns are rarely assigned as leaders of congregations apart from a supervised ministry. This is due to several related issues: Many churches resist the assignment of a female as their only pastor; some denominational offices are, to a greater or lesser degree, ideologically opposed to the placement of female pastors; and many female pastors prefer to serve on a team as opposed to carrying the primary leadership responsibility.

Those who do not receive the professional affirmation of sponsored internship, both male and female, face a decision to retrain toward another vocation/occupation and honor their call to ministry as an avocation, or move on to a self-sponsored graduate program of advanced studies in preparation for vocational ministry. It should be made clear that the absence of professional affirmation via internship does not invalidate the call to spiritual leadership. Both vocational and avocational ministers are recognized and honored in the biblical record (Acts 18:3; Romans 16:1–2; 1 Timothy 5:18; 1 Corinthians 9:15–23; 1 Thessalonians 2:9). The general infatuation with position as an exclusive designation of church leadership ignores the ubiquitous expectation that all who are gifted by the Spirit are also expected to lead in the context of their spiritual gift(s) to greater or lesser degrees of visibility. Avocational ministers who support their ministry by other means find themselves in the exalted company of the tentmaker, the Apostle Paul, and should feel no sense of inferiority as a result. They may effectively work in cooperation with the vocational leader or lead a supporting community ministry as a means of legitimately validating their calling, which is practiced as an avocation.

### **Tentative Ecclesiastical Authority and Affirmation**

Women and men called by the church to professional ministerial internship are granted tentative authority by means of licensing and credentials. The official policy of the Seventh-day Adventist faith community grants a novice intern a *missionary credential*<sup>9</sup> for a period of two years which limits ministry functions to the boundaries of the specific church/district assignment. The intern is not formally considered

to be a pastor during this period.<sup>10</sup> This license is replaced by the *ministerial license*<sup>11</sup> if the intern has completed the Master of Divinity course.

After two years of preliminary service or an earned Master of Divinity, the intern qualifies for a *ministerial license* as noted above. At this point, the intern receives official status with both the church and the government as a minister. Ecclesiastical affirmation is granted for both the missionary license and the ministerial license by means of ordination by the local congregation as an *elder*.<sup>12</sup> Women who serve under the affirmation and authority granted to them as local elders are authorized to perform the same functions with identical restrictions as men. This affirmation of ordination is granted to both male and female pastors, as are the *missionary* and *ministerial licenses*. It is important to note that formal authority is granted on the basis of the license and credential, while affirmation is extended by means of ordination.

### **Permanent Ecclesiastical Authority and Affirmation**

In total, the internship covers approximately six years, which may include the Master of Divinity program plus four years of service in a local church/district(s) or six years of local service prior to eligibility for formal denominational ordination and credentialing. It is at this point that discrimination between male and female ministry candidates formally begins. Though both affirmation and authority standards are the same for males and females from the beginning of their call to ministry process up to the end of the required time when denominational action may be taken to affirm and authorize the call, a standard of discrimination is interjected into the process which is inconsistent with the affirmation act of the local church—ordination of both males and females to ministry as a local elder. Withholding affirmation of denominational ordination of women<sup>13</sup> not only degrades the expression of affirmation, but also limits the extension of authority to women in both scope and function of ministry.

This is an interesting reality in that both male and female interns are required to qualify on the basis of the same performance criteria—identical ministry competence and personal character. If both demonstrate the

necessary competence and character during the years of service leading up to the conclusion of the intern period, then it is difficult to justify withholding the affirmation of the church. The unwillingness to extend the authority of Matthew 28:18–20 to all who have demonstrated faithfulness and professional ministry capacity during the testing period is a practice that is open to question on several fronts—ethics, theology and social justice.

### **Ethical Implications**

The foundation of ontological ethics is the commitment to do no harm.

In ethics, justice is seen as needed to govern relationships with others because as ethical people we must ensure that we respect the dignity of all as persons and give them their due. The foundation of justice is the value and dignity as persons—and the foundation of that value is due to the creation of humans in the image of God—male and female.<sup>14</sup>

If the expectations set for ministry are the same for men and women, but the faithfulness and demonstrated competence of women is rewarded on a significantly reduced scale of both authority and affirmation, then the question must be asked, “Are we as the body of Christ doing harm to those who have set their career goals on the calling to professional ministry?” If we thereby throttle the potential of women by limiting access to spiritual authority, it would be difficult to avoid the concurrent responsibility of causing harm to them professionally.

Women, and those who seek justice for women, should consider challenging the practice of disparity of authorization and affirmation of women on the basis of ethical corporate ecclesiastical behavior. Review and analysis of the ethical implication should be refined, published and discussed. This conversation should begin not at the Division or General Conference levels, but organized and processed from the local constituency sessions, then to the Union Conferences. In so doing, proponents of equal treatment of women leverage the reality of equal extension of authority and affirmation to women that presently function at the local level. The tendency for organizations to avoid disruptive issues and

the current general misunderstanding of the process of distributing authority in the church as being top down rather than bottom up (representative governance system) will likely require persistent and organized effort to overcome these limiting factors.

The ethical violations inherent in the current practice of unequal treatment of women who pursue a calling to professional ministry are clear. In order to resolve it, the process must be made consistent—either remove women from the process entirely and relegate them to permanent lay service without the affirmation of ordination as local elders or professional ministers or, more appropriately, grant them equal affirmation and authority with men who respond to the call of God to the same practice of professional ministry.

### **Theological Implications**

The intent and certainly the purpose of this article is not to detail the theological issues related to providing equal honor to both men and women who respond to God’s calling to professional ministry. Additionally, I am not ignorant of the multitude of biblical complexities that cloud this conversation and make hard and fast conclusions inappropriate. Consequently, I will here cite common issues that encourage me as a ministry practitioner to support the agenda of gender neutral affirmation and authorization of women called to service as ministers.

Adam was not whole without the helper that the Creator made to complement his needs (Genesis 1:26–27; 2:18–25). Adam and the person whom we later refer to as Eve together established a perfect whole—both family and interdependent community. They needed each other in both contexts. The needs of professional ministry in the 21st century reaffirm the practical reality that many elements of ministry require gender specificity for optimum impact. God calls people to specific ministry and equips them via spiritual gifts to accomplish the mission to which they are called. Gender is a factor in the expectations of that calling. My own pastoral ministry was strengthened by a female associate to the degree that I became committed to the condition that a male and female pastoral team has significantly greater potential for holistic service than one restricted to common male gender.



If the church adopts the pre-fall relationship of man and woman as equal and diverse, then the application in the context of the 21st century would treat male and female pastors as equal in terms of both authority and affirmation, while recognizing the complementary elements of diversity that enriches the delivery of ministry service to God and His people. This equality and recognition of generative difference is not achieved by redirecting women to “acceptable” ministry callings such as chaplaincy, but is realized in allowing for God-directed involvement in the same ministry context as men with the same calling.

At the end of Matthew 9, Jesus reflects on the magnitude of the harvest and follows with an appeal for His followers to pray for God to send out more laborers (9:37–38). Our world is growing faster than the church can reach its people with the Gospel. If God is willing to make the stones speak in the absence of the voice of children (Luke 19:40), then why would He not extend a call to women to serve in such a world that needs what they can bring to bear upon Gospel proclamation? Jesus identified the need as being satisfied with more laborers and the requested prayer was for God to provide them. If God provides them by calling women, why would we not accept that as an answer to the prayer that He provide more laborers?

We also have to come to terms with the prophecies of Joel (2:28–29) that predict the involvement of females in prophetic proclamation. The inclusive nature of the royal priesthood of believers (1 Peter 2:5f; Revelation 1:5–6) recommends an inclusive understanding of ministry without regard to gender. And the neutralizing of differences of ethnicity, nationality, gender and social class that we naturally use to distinguish people groups (Galatians 3:28; Colossians 3:11) reinforce the massive need for inclusion of all of God’s people to meet the unique challenges of ministry today. God’s answer to the prayer of His people for more laborers is made of no effect when we unequally distribute ecclesiastical rewards based solely upon gender.

### Implications for Social Justice

God transformed this planet into a paradise for the pleasure and purpose of mankind. He placed two people

into a garden they called home and for which they were equally responsible. Though their complementary differences were clearly present, their equality as persons was unaffected. The Creator planned and presented a perfect and socially just community. That utopia ended when the fruit of the tree of knowledge of good and evil was coveted and eaten. Eve’s new reality was described to her as one of social inequality—she would be ruled by her husband. Through the ages, that rulership arrangement was made tolerable when love and respect were present, but has too often, as a result of the degeneracy of sin, been a context of abuse and enslavement.

What must be remembered, however, is the fact that the power of the Holy Spirit grants options that can reverse that degeneracy. We have choices and those choices are made possible by a power that is not our own. The realities of life in a sinful world

## CALLING TO *Ministry* IS A SHARED LEADERSHIP PROCESS

may be avoided by faith in choosing a more perfect reality. We can, by faith, choose options available to the first couple—the diet of Eden, the environmental stewardship commissioned to Adam and Eve, the privilege of meeting with God in the cool of the morning and in the calm of the evening, enjoying a Sabbath rest every seventh day. Would it not also be an act of faith to adopt a social structure that honors the context of Eden? If we are bound to the rulership clause of Genesis 3:16, then are we not bound by the dietary dictates of the post-fall and post-flood period (Genesis 3:18; 9:3)?

It would seem that a faith choice to honor the equality between men and women as it existed in the original sinless context of their creation constitutes a choice that qualifies as doing “justly, loving mercy, and to walk humbly with your God” (Micah 6:8)? To expect common results and

demonstrated behaviors for men and women as the standard for professional ministry, but grant different rewards based solely on gender, violates the very foundations of social justice.

### Summary, Recommendations and Conclusion

Calling to ministry is a shared leadership process that involves God, a believer and the community of faith. It is a process that starts at God’s initiative, with the expectation of a positive response from the believer—the called one. He calls with full knowledge of the capacity, the giftedness and fitness of character possessed by the called one who has a choice in the matter and will often equivocate due to a sense of inadequacy, guilt, conflicting ambitions, etc.. Such a person will gradually or radically (less common) test the perception and validity of a call before embracing it.

This testing time incrementally engages the faith community in the process. Initial engagement is generally local in nature and informal in expression, but collectively builds confidence in the called one that God is actually leading toward a life dedicated to ministry. The intensity of the testing time increases as the called one invests in formal prescribed undergraduate theological education that moves her or him closer to the professional context via academic and practical development. The conclusion of the academic program marks, for some, the beginning of intense and intentional denominational engagement in the calling process by way of a formal internship. For others who do not receive the invitation for internship, there remains an option of avocational ministry or assuming the expense of graduate education in preparation for ministry internship at a later date.

Internship involves practical training and experience, as well as serving, as a time of observation and assessment by those who will eventually recommend the called one’s affirmation and authorization—ordination and credentialing to ministry. It is here that we face the greatest challenge relative to women called to ministry. The same door is open to men and women from the time they enter undergraduate studies until they complete their internship program—same expectations, measurements of success,

professional behaviors and demonstration of character. Then the church funnels them into separate tracks as a reward for successfully meeting the demands of ministry—same standards but different rewards for men and women. Limited affirmation and limited authority are reserved for women—commissioning and commissioned minister credentials. Full affirmation and full ministry authority are reserved for men—ordination and ministerial credentials.

The lack of parity becomes further exaggerated when the numbers of men who have little formal education for ministry are recommended for ordination and ministerial credentials, while women who have honored all the required steps in the process are denied the same. This reality begs the questions: Why do we allow and even encourage women to pursue a process toward professional fulfillment of their calling that we are unwilling to fully vest and authorize? Why don't we, by faith, honor their calling and treat them as the equals that God intended them to be and ordain them and credential them accordingly?

### Recommendations

Conferences are commissioned as the organizational entities responsible for the calling and placement of pastors and other professional ministers. The leaders who serve these organizations must muster the courage to proactively end the disparate practice of turning a blind eye to women who are called by God. They must recognize that our increasingly complex society requires the engagement of women of the Spirit who are uniquely capable of addressing these needs. Political pressures and congregational resistance to this change are not excuses for ignoring the call to lead in righteousness that marks an end

to the social injustice currently being practiced by the church in its role in recognizing and calling those whom God has already laid His hand upon. Conferences should end the practice of granting credentials and licenses that reveal bias between male and female and recommend all candidates to the Union executive committee for non-discriminatory affirmation by ordination to gospel ministry.

Congregations must be prepared spiritually and biblically by their pastors with regard to the issues associated with honoring gender equality and the benefits of building a more diverse professional leadership cadre to serve the needs of the church.

Union conference leaders and executive committees who are charged by policy with the responsibility of voting ordination should do so on an equal basis for all. They must become aware that upward flow of authority in the Seventh-day Adventist system grants their body the authority to determine who is ordained without respect to gender since there is no prohibition against the ordination of women currently extant in the policies of the church. Unions are expected to cooperate with the higher organization, but are primarily accountable to their constituent bodies. They should seek the wisdom of and act in a manner that honors their constituencies to the end that all of God's called ones are equally affirmed.

### Conclusion

A proactive response to the current practice relative to affirming and authorizing women in ministry on a par with men who are called and honored in the same profession begins with a recognition that God is no respecter of persons (Acts 10:34). He created man and woman as equals in the context of an interdependent community where

each contributed uniquely to the quality and success of that community. The interjection of sin and its consequent impact that includes issues of dominance and control disrupted this harmonious reality which can only be restored by faith in the power of a God who is committed to a restoration of the relationships and context of the Eden experience. Born again men and women can, by faith, reclaim the equality of relationship known in Eden.

Rather than cling to social structures that reflect the gender inequality of the post-fall period, we have the opportunity to add fully affirmed and fully authorized laborers to address the massive challenge of the harvest. This functional benefit, however, pales in light of the opportunity to honor the inherent value and equality of every redeemed child of God. His call is extended to all without respect to gender, nationality or social status. It is time that we collectively embrace this attribute of God and extend full affirmation and authority to all who have been called to serve Him and His people.



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## Endnotes

- <sup>1</sup> I write this chapter with full knowledge of the fact that many faith communities follow a process that differs significantly from the one described herein. I in no way intend to prescribe a process, but rather to share my faith community's process that leads toward a life of service to God, church, and community as a fully invested minister—both lay and professional clergy.
- <sup>2</sup> Thomas C. Oden, *Becoming a Minister*, Classical Pastoral Care Series (New York: Crossroad, 1987), 35.
- <sup>3</sup> Curtis C. Thomas, *Practical Wisdom for Pastors: Words of Encouragement and Counsel for a Lifetime of Ministry* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2001), 20.
- <sup>4</sup> Mark Sanborn, *The Fred Factor: How Passion in Your Work and Life Can Turn the Ordinary into the Extraordinary* (New York: Currency/Doubleday, 2004).
- <sup>5</sup> Mark Sanborn, "5 Steps to Uncovering Your True Work Passion," *Fast Company Magazine* <http://www.fastcompany.com/3005536/5-steps-uncovering-your-true-work-passion?partner=newsletter> (accessed March 19 2013).
- <sup>6</sup> Note: Disregard by conference leaders for this standard prescription of intended entrance into professional ministry is widespread. The denominational policy reads as follows: "L 05 10 Undergraduate Requirements—The four-year college program shall include a minimum of 128 semester credits, or 190 quarter credits, leading to a Bachelor of Arts degree with a major in Bible or religion." Many conferences in North America are regularly staffing their ministerial positions with persons having little or no formal academic preparation for ministry. The numbers of pastors without formal education have become so numerous and the need for them to upgrade their educational qualifications so great that the North American Division of the General Conference of SDA is considering special ministerial education training for these individuals. The challenge that presents itself is both ethical and practical in that the policy for preparatory education remains as stated above and those who follow the directive of the church invest scores of thousands of dollars to achieve a BA in religion or theology often do so without experiencing an internship invitation. Others who are called without complying with the preparatory educational requirement of a BA then find themselves on an ordination track with the possibility of theological training in which they invest little compared to those who have trusted the published process for entrance into professional ministry. The impact that this organizational behavior has on college and university schools of religion has yet to be measured, but it is likely that students who invest in a BA in theology or religion but never receive a call for employment will almost certainly have a dampening effect upon enrollment in undergraduate theology and religion degree programs.  
In this case, females who follow the prescribed educational path and who invest financially in the hope of having their call embraced and affirmed will be denied the affirmation of ordination after they have met the published qualifications for ministry at a level far beyond what will be required of the ones who enter ministry after having made little or no financial or time investment in formal education. The injustice to both men and women who honor the published requirements for entrance into professional ministry deserves reflection and an appropriate response by church leaders.
- <sup>7</sup> NAD, *Nad Working Policy-North American Division of the General Conference of Seventh-Day Adventists* (Hagerstown, MD: Review and Herald, 2007), 477.
- <sup>8</sup> James M. Freeman and Harold J. Chadwick, *Manners & Customs of the Bible* (North Brunswick, NJ: Bridge-Logos Publishers, 1998), 530.
- <sup>9</sup> NAD, 480.
- <sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, 173.
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, 171.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>13</sup> *Ibid.*, 481. Note: No specific overt reference is made regarding the disallowance of women in the ordination service apart from the use of the pronoun "his" in the policy "ORDINATION L 20 25" and the notable omission of "her" alongside the masculine counterpart. In the policy dealing with the requirements for Commissioned Ministers "L 21 05," the pronouns are coupled as "he/she" to include women. Among the differences between ordination and commissioning is the fact that the commissioned minister credential may be withdrawn at the will of the local conference, while that of the ordained minister cannot.
- <sup>14</sup> Dr. Ann Gibson, personal correspondence, March 22, 2013.

# THE SURPRISING GOD OF JONAH: His Compassion and Our Genuine Obedience

*By Jiří Moskala*

The book of Jonah is a jewel in the midst of the Hebrew Bible. It belongs among the 12 Minor Prophets, but Jonah is not a second league prophet. His message presents one of the most significant lessons with immense practical applications for pastors. It is momentous that Jonah is the only Old Testament prophet to whom Jesus directly compared Himself (Matthew 12:39–41); it means that to Jesus Christ the book of Jonah was of utmost importance.

Jonah's message shocks. It not only shook the lives of the people of his time, but it also has the power to shake ours. Prophets disturb people in their comfort zone and go against their status quo. These servants of God's covenant call people to get rid of all idols and destructive behavior, and beseech them to come back to a genuine relationship with God. Their appeals are unambiguous and call for action. One may say, if the message of a prophet does not lead to repentance, it is not the voice of a true prophet. Jonah, who lived a successful life in the eighth century B.C. (2 Kings 14:25), is not an exception. His sermon was short, direct, and focused on divine judgment: "Forty more days and Nineveh will be overturned" (Jonah 3:4).

It is interesting to observe that the book of Jonah is full of surprises. To name a few: (1) Jonah was the first Hebrew prophet sent outside of the territory of Israel and Judea to deliver God's message. As a first missionary, he had to go to the momentous city of Nineveh in the domain of the cruel Assyrian enemies of Israel [it was like sending a Jew to Berlin to meet Hitler during the Second World War]. (2) The meaning of the name "Jonah" is dove. In Nineveh the goddess Ishtar was also symbolized by a dove. It means that the Ninevites had to choose which dove they would follow, their own or

the one God sent to them. (3) Jonah was saved in the belly of the big fish. (4) Jonah preached a mini-sermon to the sailors, and they turned to God. (5) The whole city of Nineveh repented. Surprise after surprise.

For me, the biggest surprise in the book of Jonah lies in the fact that everything and everybody obeys God: the storm obeys God; the big fish obeys God; also the wind, plant, worm, even the sailors and the Ninevites obey God, but the prophet of God, Jonah, is the only exception. The Lord's messenger disobeys. Instead of going to the east, he went to the west. The prophet ran away from God! However, it is impossible to escape from God's Presence, from His loving and caring omnipresence. We are always accountable to Him.

In spite of these facts, the book of Jonah is not primarily about Jonah, but about the God of Jonah. He is a compassionate God, full of grace and mercy. He surprises by His unconditional love. One of the best ways to know the God of Jonah is to study how He treats His disobedient prophet, how He deals with Jonah when he runs away, when he unexpectedly goes wrong. We can know each other quite well until suddenly something goes wrong; how we react in such a situation reveals who we really are.

In the beginning of chapter 4, we meet a very angry Jonah. The Hebrew text literally says: "It was evil to Jonah, great evil, and he became angry" (4:1). One needs to ask what made him so furious. The answer is shocking, because the cause of his rage is God's compassion for the Ninevites! God's prophet is angry, because God saves people. Salvation seems evil to Jonah. He would rather die than to see them saved (4:3). Incredible. In his pride he is so blind that he wants to see the fulfillment of his prediction rather than their redemption. He despised

these cruel foreigners because of the Ninevites' wickedness. Jonah is the first evangelist I know who has 100 percent success and is angry because of it. Instead of being joyful and grateful, his frustration and disappointment with God and His actions sprang up. As humans we have the tendency to push some into heaven and shove others out. How comforting to know that God is in charge of each person's salvation.

God's reaction to Jonah's rage is full of understanding and patience (another surprise and unexpected feature). The good news in the book is that the God of Jonah does not want to save only the sailors and Ninevites but also Jonah. He wants to help him experience the true dimensions of conversion and salvation.

It is striking that Jonah prays to God while being angry (4:2). In the past, I thought that was inappropriate behavior, an unsuitable action. Only later did I understand that this is exactly what God wants from us: to come to Him as we are without a mask, without play acting or hiding something, open and vulnerable (just as revealed in many of the Psalms). Only when we tell Him honestly and sincerely everything and disclose all to Him—even our negative emotions, deep disappointments and hidden thinking—can He change them and heal us! Salvation means healing according to the Bible (Psalm 41:4). If we hide our anger, insults, frustrations and dissatisfactions inside of us, these negative feelings will grow, choke us, take the joy out of life, and eventually kill our spiritual life. When Jonah prays to God, there is hope for Jonah. When we pray, there is hope for us.

Jonah had good information about God, but this "head religion" did not make him a kind, warm, loving and sensitive person. He knew that His God was "a gracious and compassionate



God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity" (4:2; he quotes God Himself; see Exodus 34:6–7), but no ethical consequences of this fact appeared in his life. No sign of God's gracious compassion is displayed. His behavior reveals bad morality, because his heart was not changed through this knowledge. It is not enough to have an intellectual religion. If one's life reveals a cold heart and damaging attitudes, it means that the transforming grace of God has not yet been fully accepted, because God's amazing grace is always a transforming grace. God's love warms.

God intervenes in favor of Jonah, because He wants to help him to understand and grow. He wants to save him from his anger, prejudice, hatred, enmity, racism, exclusivism, self-centeredness and feelings of superiority. The Lord made a plant for Jonah that shaded him; and for the first time in the book, we read that Jonah is happy, "extremely happy" (4:6). The cause of his happiness was a thing, a plant, which consequently became his comfort. He is not rejoicing over the people and their repentance but over the pleasant shade.

However, God intervenes once more, and the next day the enjoyable plant is dead. The cause of his external happiness is gone, and Jonah pities his loss and himself. God then comes to him with the question, the last question of the book. But what a question! God said (in a short paraphrase of verse 10): "You pitied the plant, Jonah, but I pitied the people. You cried over a thing, but I showed mercy for persons. Instead of lamenting over a plant that appeared without any of your effort, work or achievement, should you not do the same as I and have compassion for people?"

There is no recorded answer from Jonah to this divine question. Why does the book end with a question mark? Because only you and I can answer this pertinent question: What attitude do we have toward people who are different than we are (with different color, gender, education, position, nationality, religion or behavior) and, according to our opinion, do not deserve God's mercy? Do we have the same unselfish and warming love in our hearts toward other people as God has? Do we have the same compassion toward them as God does?

God's compassion is incomprehensible, incomparable, astonishing, challenging and transforming! The

book of Jonah confronts us with the real issues of life. God wants us to have courage to face the challenges of life with a proper attitude. He desires us to put down all barriers of religion, race, color, education, geography, language, gender and politics. He wants to save everyone without reservation. The warm compassion of God for people is contrasted with the cold attitude of the prophet. Jonah confesses that he had an attitude of ice toward others and challenges us not to commit the same mistake he did. Jonah was commissioned but not committed.

Let us consider the life of Jonah from a different perspective. God as a Sovereign Lord calls Jonah to go to Nineveh to deliver an important message of judgment—get up, go and preach (Jonah 1:1–2). He refuses and disobeys God's commands, and the result is that the prophet goes down. The biblical text stresses his downward movement while running away from God. First he went down to Joppa,

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then to the harbor, after that down to the boat, then to the lowest place in the boat, and finally we encounter him at the bottom of the ocean. The downward movement is very graphic. Every time we run from God, we go down!

Then he cried to the Lord, and the compassionate, gracious and loving God saved him. Jonah praised the Lord for his deliverance when he was still in the belly of the big fish (see Jonah 2). Even though he accepted salvation personally, he took it selfishly. It is true that we need to take salvation personally (Jesus Christ died for me!), but the tragedy happens when we take it narrow-mindedly: salvation for me, yes, for my family, friends, group, tribe, nation, but not so much for others. We always have the tendency to dictate to God whom He should save and whom He should assign to perdition. It is so refreshing to know that we have no power to preclude the salvation of others, and that God ultimately decides

this matter, because He understands human hearts and minds.

Afterwards, God called Jonah for the second time. "Get up, go to Nineveh and preach!" (3:1–2). Jonah got up, went to Nineveh, and preached. His behavior leads to a crucial question: Was he now an obedient prophet? Well, he preached to the Ninevites, but in his heart were hatred, enmity, anger, bitterness and prejudice! He experienced God's grace but was not yet willing to extend this same grace to others; his true conversion was missing.

These exegetical observations lead us to a very significant statement: God does not want our obedience. Let me finish this scandalous statement: God does not want our obedience to be of Jonah's type. This kind of obedience is only for appearance—on the surface, outward and shallow. God does not want us to obey Him like drilled horses or dogs, or like parrots where we only repeat after Him what He said without allowing Him to transform us by His Word, grace and Spirit. Nor does He want our obedience to be like the obedience of soldiers who follow commands without thinking or understanding as Nazi officers, during the Nuremberg, Germany, International War Tribunal after the Second World War, claimed: "I did nothing wrong; I only obeyed the orders."

God, of course, wants us to obey Him but desires that our obedience comes as a result of knowing Him for who He is (through His words and actions). He desires that our obedience spring from our heart and is motivated by gratitude, thankfulness, and love for Him and His incomprehensible goodness. When we are attracted to the kindness of God (Romans 2:4), then we do not follow Him because we have to, but because we want to. Our Lord really longs to see us behaving as responsible sons and daughters of God!

Obedience is not a mere outward compliance, but a service of love. Superficial obedience is not enough! True, genuine obedience is never forced or blind. It comes out of the practical knowledge and relationship with the true, loving, and holy God. This obedience does not mean that we will always understand God's purposes, providence and events in our lives but that we will follow Him no matter what, because we personally know Him and His love for us! Only in this way can we indeed be loving, warm, contagious and compassionate people who show Adventism in a godly and attractive way.

# THE SPIRITUAL GIFT OF SCHOLARSHIP

By Martin Hanna

Christians are sometimes “schizophrenic” about scholarship. We agree with Francis Bacon that “knowledge is power,” and we get as much as we can, and we use it to defend and proclaim gospel truth. At the same time, we recognize that scholarship can undermine some of our preferred perspectives. So we wrestle with the question: How can we wholeheartedly welcome scholarship when it sometimes seems to undermine what we thought was true?

An answer to this question may be discovered by a study of scholarship as a spiritual gift given to the church by Christ.<sup>1</sup> Through this gift, Christians may safely use scholarship to correct and deepen our faith without compromising truth. In subsequent sections of this article I propose that a Bible-based and Christ-centered spiritual gift of scholarship empowers church growth and an international mission that is cosmic in scope.

**1. Bible-based.** The Old Testament drama of Daniel and his friends illustrates how God is the source of the spiritual gift of scholarship. “God gave them knowledge and skill” (Daniel 1:17)<sup>2</sup> so that they were “gifted in all wisdom, possessing knowledge and quick to understand” (1:4). Also, in the New Testament, this spiritual gift is indicated in Paul’s statement that “God has appointed teachers in the church” (1 Corinthians 12:28; cf. Ephesians 4:11) along with “the word of wisdom” and “the word of knowledge” (1 Corinthians 12:8).<sup>3</sup>

One of the reasons this gift is needed is because some parts of the Bible are difficult to understand. Peter writes that “our beloved brother Paul, ... has written ... some things hard to understand, which untaught and unstable people twist to their own destruction, as they do the rest of the Scriptures” (2 Peter 3:15–16).<sup>4</sup> While only God has perfect understanding

of the Bible, we should study diligently since (as Peter indicates) some misunderstandings can be catastrophic.

The Bible-based spiritual gift of scholarship helps the church discern the difference between true and false scholarship. Paul warns Christians to: “Beware lest anyone deceive you through philosophy and empty deceit according to the tradition of men, according to the basic principles of the world (*kosmos*), and not according to Christ” (Colossians 2:8).<sup>5</sup> Here, Paul is rejecting philosophy that is contrary to Christ while proposing a Christ-centered philosophy.

We are all  
*woven together*  
in the web  
of  
HUMANITY

**2. Christ-Centered.** Jesus, the Master Teacher, instructed His scholars that “the Holy Spirit” “will teach you all things” in a Christ-centered curriculum since “He will testify of Me” (John 14:26; 15:26). Therefore, “it is to your advantage that I go away” because “I still have many things to say to you, but you cannot bear them now. However, when He, the Spirit of truth, has come, He will guide you into all truth” (16:7, 12–13). Paul also teaches concerning “Christ in Whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” (Colossians 2:2–3).

The spiritual gift of scholarship is supported by salvation through Christ, as illustrated by the experience of

Daniel’s three friends in the fiery furnace when king Nebuchadnezzar said: “Look! ... I see four men loose walking in the midst of the fire and they are not hurt; and the form of the fourth is like the Son of God” (Daniel 3:25). Similarly, at “the time of the end” (12:4), “Michael shall stand up” (12:1) for His people as He stood up for them in the fiery furnace. “Michael the archangel” (Jude 1:9) is “the Lord Himself” who “will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God. And the dead in Christ will rise first” (1 Thessalonians 4:16).

**3. Church growth.** While we wait for the return of Christ, we are to make use of the spiritual gift of scholarship for the purpose of church growth. In this way, we can become wiser than Daniel, who wrote: “Although I heard I did not understand” (Daniel 12:8). Daniel was told to “shut up the words and seal the book until the time of the end” when “knowledge shall increase” (12:4). This prophecy is to be fulfilled in the church since “none of the wicked shall understand” (12:10) this increase in knowledge.

The spiritual gift of scholarship supports growth in faith, knowledge, and ministry or service. “When He ascended,” Christ “gave gifts” (Ephesians 4:8) to the church “for the equipping of the saints for the work of the ministry, for edifying the body of Christ, till we all come into the unity of the faith and of the knowledge of the Son of God” (4:12–13). This involves an “increase that is from God” (Colossians 2:19) through Christ. “In Him dwells all the fullness of the Godhead bodily; and you are complete in Him” (2:9–10) since “He is the head of the body, the church” (1:18; cf. 1:24).

**4. International Mission.** The purpose of church growth is to accomplish an international evangelistic mission.



Equipped with spiritual gifts, including scholarship, the church will reach the nations. “The mystery . . . revealed to His saints” (Colossians 1:26), which “God willed to make known . . . among the Gentiles [*ethnos*, the nations],” “is Christ” (1:27). This mission includes the scholarship of teaching, because “we preach” by “teaching” everyone “in all wisdom” “in Christ Jesus” (1:28). Daniel describes our destiny this way: “Those who are wise shall shine like the brightness of the firmament, and those who turn many to righteousness as the stars forever and ever” (Daniel 12:3).

Christ-centered scholarship in the church seeks the profit of all humanity. Ellen White teaches us that “every church member should feel an interest in all that concerns the human brotherhood as well as the brotherhood in Christ.”<sup>6</sup> “We are all woven together in the web of humanity.”<sup>7</sup> “Let us bear in mind that Christ is the great central heart from which the life-blood flows to every part of the great body of humanity. He is the head from which extend the nerves that reach even to the most minute and most remote parts of the body [of humanity].”<sup>8</sup>

**5. Cosmic Scope.** In order to effectively fulfill our mission to the nations, we must increase our understanding of the universal scope of the spiritual gift of scholarship. While no one person can perfect even one area of scholarship, each Christian is called to exercise their gift “for the profit of all” (1 Corinthians 12:7). Anything less than this is a dishonor to Jesus, our Master Teacher.

Christian scholarship is as comprehensive as the cosmos because: by

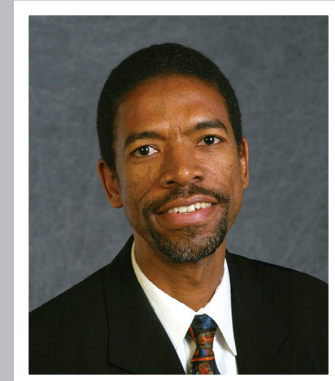
Christ “all things were created. . . . And He is before all things, and in Him all things consist” (Colossians 1:16–17) and are reconciled (1:20). Christ “is the head of all principality and power” (2:10).<sup>9</sup> As Bruce Norman points out, “Paul used some of the common cosmological terminology” of his time and infused it “with a different meaning” whereby “Christ” is “the beginning and the end of cosmology.”<sup>10</sup>

Inspired by this cosmic Christ, Ellen White welcomes a two-way illumination between science and theology. She writes that: “The book of nature and the written word do not disagree; each sheds light on the other. Rightly understood they make us acquainted with God and His character by teaching us something of the wise and beneficent laws through which he works. We are thus led to adore his name and to have an intelligent trust in his word.”<sup>11</sup>

**Conclusion.** This same inspiration actuates an appeal Ellen White made at the Battle Creek College in 1883: “Dear youth, what is the aim and purpose of your life? Are you ambitious for education that you may have a name and position in the world? Have you thoughts that you dare not express, that you may one day stand upon the summit of intellectual greatness; that you may sit in deliberative and legislative councils, and help to enact laws for the nation? There is nothing wrong in these aspirations. You may every one of you make your mark. You should be content with no mean attainments. Aim high, and spare no pains to reach the standard.”<sup>12</sup>

A Bible-based and Christ-centered spiritual gift of scholarship empowers a church growth and an international

mission that is cosmic in scope. With such a gift from God, we must dare to be like Daniel and his friends. “As for these four young men, God gave them knowledge and skill in all literature and wisdom; and Daniel had understanding of visions and dreams” (Daniel 1:17). “In all matters of wisdom and understanding about which the king examined them, he found them ten times better” than everyone else (1:20).

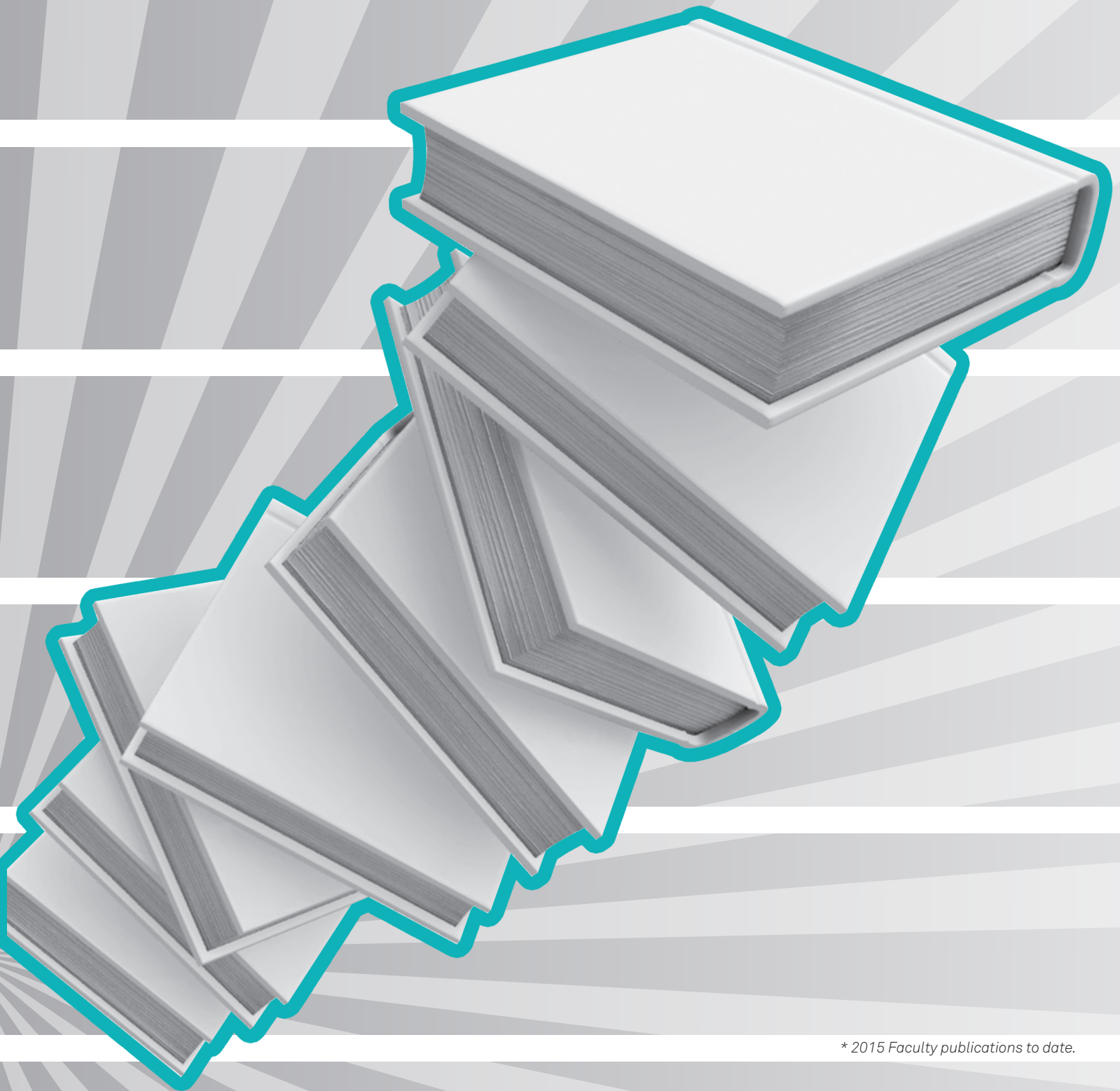


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## Endnotes

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As an educating power the Bible is without a rival. Nothing will so impart vigor to all the faculties as requiring students to grasp the stupendous truths of revelation. The mind gradually adapts itself to the subjects upon which it is allowed to dwell. If occupied with commonplace matters only, to the exclusion of grand and lofty themes, it will become dwarfed and enfeebled. If never required to grapple with difficult problems, or put to the stretch to comprehend important truths, it will, after a time, almost lose the power of growth.

*Ellen G. White*

*(Counsels on Education, Page 24)*

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### **Jiří Moskala** **Consulting Editor**

Seminary Dean, professor of Old Testament exegesis and theology. Previously a pastor, administrator, and teacher in the Czech Republic.



### **Hyveth Williams** **Managing Editor/Writer**

Biography on page 12.



### **Amy Rhodes** **Graphic Designer**

A graduate of Andrews University with a BFA in art direction and advertising. Employed by the Seminary dean's office since 2014.



### **Lucian Poama** **Student/Photographer**

Candidate for the Master of Divinity degree. Served in the Manitoba/Saskatchewan Adventist Conference in Canada prior to attending the Seminary.



### **Benjamin Martin** **Student/Photographer**

A recipient of the Master of Divinity in May, 2015. He currently serves as youth pastor of Pioneer Memorial Church at Andrews University.



### **Bonnie J. Beres** **Copy Editor**

Graduate of Andrews University with a BA in English, served in the Seminary for 40 years, currently admin. asst. in the Department of Christian Ministry.



### **Geraldine Sigué** **Student/Writer**

Recipient of the Master of Divinity in May, 2015, while serving as youth pastor at Living Word Fellowship SDA Church.



### **Endri Misho** **Student/Writer**

Recipient of the Master of Divinity in May 2015. He also served as a research graduate assistant while at the Seminary.



### **Dorothy Show** **Editorial Assistant**

Executive administrative assistant, Seminary deans' office.



ANDREWS UNIVERSITY PRESENTS

# THE SUMMIT ON RACE

A CANDID CONVERSATION ON RACE RELATIONS  
WITHIN THE SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTIST CHURCH

APRIL 5 THRU 9, 2016

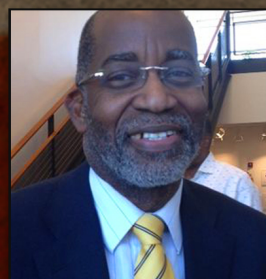
SPEAKERS ARE DISTINGUISHED SEVENTH-DAY ADVENTISTS



**BARRY BLACK**  
US SENATE CHAPLAIN



**DAN JACKSON**  
NAD PRESIDENT



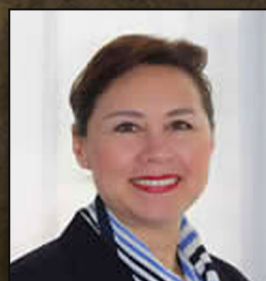
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